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The Perfectionist's Guide to Fantastic Video

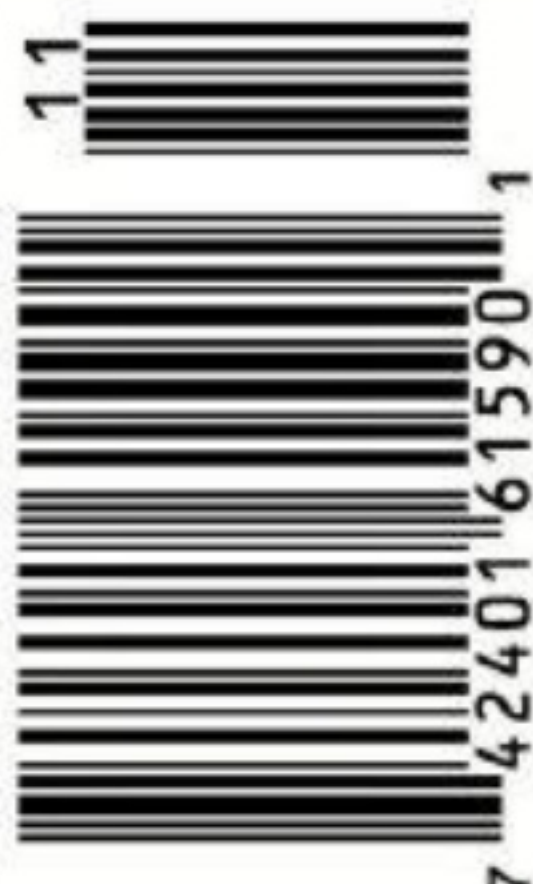


METROPOLIS!

28 DAYS LATER!
DAREDEVIL!
TARGETS!

*Plus! TOHO'S
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Video★ Watchdog®

the Perfectionist's
Guide to
Fantastic Video

No. 101 / NOV 2003

*"It's amazing what you can see
while you're sittin'."*

—THE STRAIGHT STORY (1999)

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- Front: Charlie Largent's glimmering interpretation of Rotwang's Robot from **METROPOLIS** (1927), now available from Kino on Video.
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- Inside: Director Danny Boyle in an eerily composed behind-the-scenes shot from the set of 20th Century Fox's **28 DAYS LATER...** (2002), photographed by Peter Mountain.
- Back: Ben Affleck suits up to fight crime in **DAREDEVIL** (2002), now available from 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment.

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KENNEL

ANTHONY AMBROGIO wonders if anyone hearing that VIDEO WATCHDOG has reached #101, had “a silly millimeter longer” running through their head.

STEPHEN R. BISSETTE is currently at work on a mammoth history of film production in his home state of Vermont.

JOHN CHARLES has contributed to 89 consecutive issues of VW and reviewed far more tapes and discs than he has time to count. He loves his job and our new look.

BILL COOKE has written an extensive article about Japanese horror master Nobuo Nakagawa (*Jigoku*, “Hell”) for a future issue of VW.

SHANE M. DALLMANN refused to run in California’s recall election, despite the overwhelming certainty that he would have won.

JOE DANTE’s new movie **LOONEY TUNES—BACK IN ACTION** is in theaters now. His classic werewolf film **THE HOWLING** is also now available as a Special Edition DVD from MGM Home Entertainment.

TIM LUCAS is sitting in the same chair all day, every day, editing this magazine, doing the final edit on his Bava book and writing a new screen treatment.

KIM NEWMAN recently attended the FrightFest weekend in London. His pick of the festival is Guy Maddin’s **DRACULA, PAGES FROM A VIRGIN’S DIARY**.

RICHARD HARLAND SMITH recently interviewed Juan Lopez Moctezuma’s daughter for the upcoming Midnight Marquee/Luminary Press book **VAMPIROS AND MONSTRUOS: THE MEXICAN HORROR FILM OF THE 20TH CENTURY**.

REBECCA & SAM UMLAND are considering moving Becky’s birthday from September 11 to another date in that month.

DAVID WHITE has officially become a Fantômas fanatic.

DOUGLAS E. WINTER uses Brian Eno’s “Oblique Strategies” cards to decide what to cover in his “Audio Watchdog” column.

VW THANKS & PHOTO CREDITS:

ADV Films/Rod Peters (52-54), Anchor Bay Entertainment/Perry Martin & Sue Procko PR (61), Box Office Spectaculars (48, 51), Columbia TriStar/Kavita Smith (5, 11, 27, 32, 33-35), Criterion/R. O’Donnell (16, 55, 56, 76), Dimension Home Video (13), Elite Entertainment, Image Entertainment/Spencer Savage (10, 12, 19), Kino on Video/Rodrigo Brandao (15, 30, 32, 33, 26, 28, 29), Sanney Leung, Herschell Gordon Lewis, McFarland and Company, MGM Home Entertainment/Steve Wegner (4, 8, 17a), Paramount Home Entertainment (60), Poker Industries/Michael Basden (63), Something Weird Video/Mike Vraney & Lisa Petrucci (58, 59), Street & Smith Publishing (7), Synapse Films/Don May, Jr. & Jerry Chandler (17b), 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment (inside, back, 36-42), University Press of Kentucky, VCI Entertainment/Bob Blair (18, 44-47), Velocity Home Entertainment (9), Bob Villard Collection (21, 24), Warner Home Video/Ronnie Sass & Karen Penhale (23), Xploited Cinema/Tony Simonelli (65-67 ©Toho Productions), Samuel Z. Archive (69).

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In memory of our friend Gordon Mitchell, interviewed in VW #48.

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THE WATCHDOG BARKS



IT WAS 20 MINUTES into **BLOOD FEAST 2**, Herschell Gordon Lewis' first film in over 30 years, when Donna entered the room to tell me that Bill

Kelley had died. Bill had been in my thoughts as I unwrapped the disc; he interviewed Herschell (an old friend) for VW #60, and the last time we spoke—a week or so earlier—Bill had sent me a tape of his most recent public service TV spot for the Broward County Property Appraiser's office in Miami, which featured a cameo by Herschell and a huge office placard emblazoned with my name. That same day, I received in the mail a review copy of Benjamin Halligan's new book on Michael Reeves, in which I was pleased to see references to Bill's pioneering biographical article on Reeves, published by CINEFANTASTIQUE in 1991. Bill had died of heart failure the day before, August 11, at the age of 54; on August 12, he was in the air all around me.

Bill and I were close friends for more than 20 years. We swapped tapes of countless movies, compared notes, laughed a lot (he loved to start a phone call without even saying "Hello," instead launching into the filthiest joke imaginable); we also gossiped, held each other up, grieved over our cats together—but we never met. Not once. Yet we loved each other and, once or twice, said as much. Bill was plagued by ill health for most of his life—Crohn's Disease (first diagnosed when he was 14), colitis, cancer and chemotherapy, heart attacks; we bade emotional "just in case" farewells to one another on the eves of his major surgeries, which became so frequent that I had to distance myself from Bill for awhile. I'm grateful that, at the time of his death, we had found our way back to where we had been, talking and laughing and sharing information.

Born in Lancaster, Pennsylvania in 1950, Bill was a Monster Kid whose passion for movies was ignited by seeing **CURSE OF FRANKENSTEIN** and **HORROR OF DRACULA** when he was 8 or 9 years old. He could, and would, turn any conversation to the subject of Hammer films. He made his first 8mm home movie when he was 10, and he later studied film at the University of Miami under Paul Nagel, who had dubbed and directed the English versions of several K. Gordon Murray Mexican imports; Bill later interviewed his old professor for the second

issue of VW. Bill's career was richly varied: he was a story writer for DC Comics (where he collaborated with VW's Steve Bissette on **HOUSE OF MYSTERY**, **TALES OF THE UNEXPECTED** and **SGT. ROCK**) and Warren publications (**CREEPY**, **EERIE**); an actor, whose scattered filmography included Mark Robson's 1972 film **LIMBO**, the **FLIPPER** remake, voice work for DTV animated programs, and countless others impossible to verify (including a Miami-shot Italian production starring Barry Primus and directed by Umberto Lenzi); a TV reporter for Ft. Lauderdale's **SUN-SENTINEL** newspaper for 10 years; a longtime contributor to CFQ and VW (he also wrote a memoir of Peter Cushing for our 25th issue); an associate producer of **FLESH AND BLOOD: THE HAMMER HERITAGE OF HORROR** (1994); the author of the **NEW YORK TIMES** syndicated column "Primal Screen"; and finally, the writer/director of some amusing Miami area commercials that cleverly incorporated PD cameos by everyone from Bela Lugosi to Varan the Unbelievable. As a last act, shortly before he died, Bill wrote a loving Introduction to Tom Johnson & Mark A. Miller's forthcoming book on the films of Christopher Lee—who had been Bill's personal, close and perhaps best friend since the mid-1970s.

During our last talk, I thanked Bill for finally unearthing the long-lost transcript of a 1975 telephone interview he had conducted with Barry Sullivan about **PLANET OF THE VAMPIRES**; I told him it was literally the last thing I added to my Mario Bava book manuscript before locking it down. "So it took me to finish it for ya!" he laughed. Before signing off, he gave me the good news that he was resuming work on **MANN OF THE WEST**, a biography of Anthony Mann he had outlined back in the early 1990s and abandoned at the time of James Stewart's death in 1997, considering an interview with the star essential to its integrity. With the release of a Stewart audio commentary on the DVD of **WINCHESTER 73**, the last obstacle to his dream had been removed—or so it seemed. There was still one more: a body made frail by too much disease, too much invasive surgery.

When I e-mailed Herschell Gordon Lewis with the news of Bill's passing, he responded: "Tim, I'm as devastated as you are. I had lunch with Bill last Thursday [August 7]. He was (as always) chipper and bright, planning hip replacement surgery this fall. Thanks for your note. We all mourn."

..... **Tim Lucas**

WATCHDOG NEWS

Beyond the Boomstick



DVD Updates

By Rebecca & Sam Umland

Sam Raimi's frequently reissued **ARMY OF DARKNESS** (1993) has finally been released in its definitive form as a Region 3 NTSC DVD by MGM Home Entertainment. Running 96m 8s, it is longer than the averred "Director's Cut" version recently reissued domestically by Anchor Bay Entertainment on its "Boomstick Edition" (\$29.98). The "Boomstick Edition" is actually a two-disc set consisting of ABE's previously issued, expanded "Bootleg Edition" on one disc and the truncated (80m 20s) US theatrical cut on the other, with all the supplements of their previous issues included. However, ABE's "Bootleg Edition" did not use original film elements for the transfer, utilizing blurry video dupes of some footage to replace the deleted footage of the domestic release. In contrast, MGM—which currently owns the rights to **ARMY OF DARKNESS** in most foreign territories—



*Embeth Davidtz in the clutches of Evil Ash (Bruce Campbell)—a scene restored on a new Region 3 import disc of **ARMY OF DARKNESS**.*

has issued the film on DVD in a glorious transfer, with a sharp, colorful picture presented in anamorphic (16:9) widescreen using *all original* film elements, with a robust DD-5.1 soundtrack, to boot. MGM's import, which opens up all four sides when compared to ABE's tightly framed transfer, actually contains most of the extras from ABE's disc—or at least the extras that matter—including the director's audio commentary, deleted scenes, the alternative "S-Mart" ending, and the theatrical trailer. More importantly, it contains the scene, omitted in ABE's version, of Evil Ash ripping off Sheila's clothing. The MGM disc confirms what we speculated some years ago in our article on the EVIL DEAD trilogy [VW 46:32]: that the standard-framed Korean Jei Wea laserdisc (a bootleg) was in fact the cut that Raimi submitted to Dino DeLaurentiis in 1991, cut by over 15m for its US theatrical run in 1993. The real anomaly that remains is the version that appeared on Japanese laserdisc in the mid-'90s, retitled **CAPTAIN SUPERMARKET: EVIL DEAD III**, which ran 88m 28s, longer than the US domestic release but

shorter than the DEG cut: why is it different from the other Asian versions? It's possible that the Japanese distributor re-cut it, but for what purpose?

At any rate, **ARMY OF DARKNESS** currently exists in more versions than any other film we can think of, but we are now assured of having the actual director's cut. In addition to traditional Chinese subtitles, the MGM disc is also subtitled in English, Korean, Spanish, Thai, Bahasa (Indonesia), and Portuguese. Available from Poker Industries or YesAsia (see Sources). The global.yesasia.com website lists the running time as 93m, but this is incorrect—it is the complete version they have available.

Columbia TriStar has reissued the intriguing **THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES** (2002) as a two-disc "Special Edition" (\$27.95) only a year after its initial DVD release [reviewed VW 93:55]. The first DVD issue presented the film in a widescreen (2.31:1) anamorphic transfer on one side and a standard version on the other. The Special Edition contains only the anamorphic widescreen transfer on Disc 1, in a sharp and colorful presentation identical to that of the first issue, including

the same number of scene selections. Although the transfer is the same, the SE includes an audio commentary by director Mark Pellington (**ARLINGTON ROAD**) and adds filmographies for him, writer Richard Hatem, Richard Gere, Laura Linney, Debra Messing and Will Patton (but not, strangely, for Alan Bates).

Disc 2 includes several supplements not found on the previous release, although they are a mixed bag. The 43m 33s "Search for The Mothman" presents the historical context of the Mothman sightings in the Point Pleasant area, including interviews with surviving witnesses, as well as paranormal researchers Loren Coleman and, perhaps more importantly, John Keel, author of the cult 1975 book, **THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES**, upon which the film is loosely based. While the documentary capably reconstructs the historical context, and includes actual news footage of the Silver Bridge disaster—which occurred on December 15, 1967—it inexplicably omits any discussion of a key figure in the film, the mysterious entity known as Indrid Cold. (Neither Keel's source text nor

Richard Gere shows a different side of his bedside manner in THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES.



the film is clear on whether Indrid Cold and the Mothman are the same Janus-faced entity.) The second disc also includes 60m of video footage consisting of a sort of behind-the-scenes diary of director Mark Pellington, made during the arduous 67-day shoot, from January to March 2001. While the footage ably captures the difficulties of making a feature film, including problems arising from conflicting artistic personalities, it offers little insight into the film itself. Five deleted scenes totalling 12m are also included; one scene is without the audio track and another is without the completed special effects footage. The sequence without the finished effects footage makes an explicit connection between the Mothman sightings and the heightened UFO activity reported in the Point Pleasant area at the time, which is implied in the theatrical cut but never made explicit. Lastly, the second disc carries over the 4m 46s music video "Half Light," directed by Pellington and performed by Low with musical support by tomandandy (who composed the film's musical score), which was included on the earlier disc.

THE SHADOW in the Public Domain

By David White

Fans of *The Shadow*, Maxwell Grant's (aka Walter B. Gibson's) pioneering pulp mainstay, will be pleased to discover that three previously hard-to-locate feature-length films starring their favorite crime-fighter have been issued on DVD by the public domain labels Marengo Films and Alpha Video.

THE SHADOW STRIKES, produced by Grand National in 1937, was directed by Lynn Shores (**CHARLIE CHAN IN THE**

WAX MUSEUM) and stars Rod LaRocque as "amateur criminologist"/alter ego Lamont Granston (*sic*, should be "Cranston"). Although *The Shadow* had appeared in a series of six short films produced by Universal in the early 1930's, **THE SHADOW STRIKES** marked the character's feature-length debut. Critics and audiences were underwhelmed and it's easy to see why. Based on the Maxwell Grant pulp novel *GHOST OF THE MANOR* (*THE SHADOW* #32; June 15, 1933) and running just over an hour, the film sports an undistinguished inheritance-murder plot and is pretty difficult to slog through. Even viewers tolerant of the stagy feel of early talkies will find it more sluggish than usual. LaRocque spends a scant few minutes in *The Shadow*'s tell-tale cloak and hat, and the rest of time behind slicked-back hair and a pencil-thin mustache, passing himself off as attorney Chester Randall. The film's single point of interest is an underdeveloped plot point having to do with Granston searching for the man who murdered his father. Not the most original motivation for a crime-fighter, at least not when seen today, but it's interesting to note that the film was released a year before *Batman* was introduced in the pages of *DETECTIVE COMICS* #27. Talky and lacking in suspense, the film will be of interest to hardcore pulp fanatics as being one of the few films based on a true Gibson manuscript. All others are urged to beware.

Even less faithful to its source material is the immediate sequel, **INTERNATIONAL CRIME**, released the following year and based on *THE FOXHOUND* by Theodore Tinsley (*THE SHADOW* #118; January 15, 1937—Tinsley being one of several authors who shared the "Maxwell Grant" pseudonym with its originator, Gibson). Also starring Rod LaRocque, the

film demotes *The Shadow* from a sinister, mysterious figure of the night to a mere radio personality. LaRocque, however, seems much more comfortable this time around and invests his performance with a jaunty, witty quality that is decidedly un-shadowlike, but entertaining nonetheless. Purists will be horrified to discover that the capable Margo Lane has been transformed into a blonde bimbo with the more playful sobriquet "Phoebe" Lane (**MR. SMITH GOES TO WASHINGTON**'s Astrid Allwyn). Despite these disappointments, there is fun to be had as long as the viewer is able to put aside purist expectations. The chemistry between LaRocque and Allwyn is zippy and theatrical, somewhere between the champagne banter of William Powell and Myrna Loy and the eyeball-rolling humor of George Burns and Gracie Allen. Their shenanigans are aided, in no small part, by the direction of Charles Lamont, a specialist in Hollywood comedies who would go on to direct films featuring Abbott & Costello, Ma & Pa Kettle and Francis the Talking Mule.

Marengo Films has thoughtfully paired the two films on a single, reasonably priced DVD. Both films appear to be complete. Neither has been digitally scrubbed in any way, but both source prints are in pretty decent shape. **THE SHADOW STRIKES** is the weaker of the two, visually and audibly, with a number of scratches and a tinny soundtrack that occasionally makes the higher-pitched dialogue (ie., the actresses) hard to decipher. **INTERNATIONAL CRIME** looks and sounds much better, and would be enough to recommend the disc if it weren't for the last 5m of the film, which is plagued by sound dropouts. *Shadow* completists will want to snap up the disc anyway, but casual




Classic pulp art from the covers of the magazine that gave us *THE SHADOW STRIKES* (left) and *INTERNATIONAL CRIME* (right).

consumers should consider themselves warned. The packaging states the running time of **THE SHADOW STRIKES** as 62m and **INTERNATIONAL CRIME** as 87m; close enough for government work as far as the former is concerned (it's actually 61m 36s), but the latter clocks in far short of the mark at 63m 20s. Both films are also available on VHS as single features.

Of much more interest is Alpha Video's release of the bizarre **INVISIBLE AVENGER**. Sporting no fewer than three directors, including the great cinematographer James Wong Howe (**SECONDS**), the film is a slapdash, dime-store affair with just enough interest to sustain its brief running time. Filmed in 1958, reportedly as a television pilot, **INVISIBLE AVENGER** looks like the cheapest of drive-in movies but sports wonderfully atmospheric New Orleans locations

and an authentic jazz soundtrack. Although, once again, Margo Lane and the telltale hat and cloak are nowhere in sight, this Shadow (**TERROR IS A MAN**'s Richard Derr) is based on the radio version, with the powers to "cloud men's minds" and physically manifest himself as a shadow; and we finally get to hear the laugh made famous on the radio. The story, involving an exiled South American president, would have been right at home on the radio or in the pulps, and only the conclusion, which takes place aboard a ship instead of on the streets of New Orleans, is a bit of a letdown. Derr gives a passable performance as Lamont Cranston (with a freakish Casanova complex), but even more curious is the addition of Cranston's Chandu-like companion Jogendra (played by Mark Daniels of 1938's **SEX MADNESS**). The two

make an intriguing pair—so intriguing, in fact, that one has difficulty watching them meditate side-by-side in their short bathrobes without thinking that Dr. Frederic Wertham would have had a field day with this one!

Although this pilot never resulted in a series, a longer version entitled **BOURBON STREET SHADOWS** was released to theaters in 1962. (The previews for this version can be found on some of the double-feature discs from Something Weird Video.) While we were unable to compare the two versions, **INVISIBLE AVENGER** is well-paced and, at a mere 56m 40s, not a minute too short. We're perfectly satisfied with Alpha's DVD, which despite the typical PD presentation, looks and sounds just fine. Now, if only Alpha would give us what we really want to see: Monogram's **SHADOW** trilogy, starring Kane Richmond! 



DOG BYTES

Devils Who Like Hellraisers



Charles Bronson is taunted by a literally naked killer in the Cannon thriller *10 to MIDNIGHT*.

10 TO MIDNIGHT

1983, MGM Home Entertainment, DD-2.0/16:9/LB/ST/CC/+, \$14.95, 101m 50s, DVD-1
By John Charles

Produced 30 years after his supporting role in **HOUSE OF WAX** (1953), this Cannon release is the only other horror film to feature Charles Bronson, who died last August. Psychotic office worker Warren Stacy (Gene Davis) preys upon a series of women, slaying them while he is naked. The case particularly concerns police lieutenant Leo Kessler (Bronson), who has seen the system fail too many times during his years on the force. Desperate to get Stacy off the streets, Kessler plants evidence to make ristraight-arrow partner (Andrew Stevens), who is called as a witness and refuses to perjure himself. As a result, Stacy

goes free and plans to get revenge by murdering the lieutenant's daughter (Lisa Eilbacher). An uneasy mix of Bronson's vigilante persona and the slasher genre,

A NOTE ON TIMINGS

The timings listed for the following tapes reflect only the length of the film itself, and do not include such ephemera as video company logos, FBI warnings, supplementary trailers, or MPAA ratings certificates. The only exceptions to this rule are those films in which the soundtrack is first heard while the distributor's logo is still onscreen.

KEY

+	Supplements
16:9	WS TV Adaptable
CC	Closed Captioned
D	Digital
DD	Dolby Digital
DTS	Digital Theater Systems (Audio)
DVD-0	No Region Code
DVD-1	USA, Canada
DVD-2	Europe, Japan
DVD-3	Most of Asia
HF	Hi-Fi
LB	Letterboxed
MA	Multiple Audio
NSR	No Suggested Retail
OOP	Out of Print
P&S	Pan&Scan
S	Stereo
SS	Surround Sound
ST	Subtitles

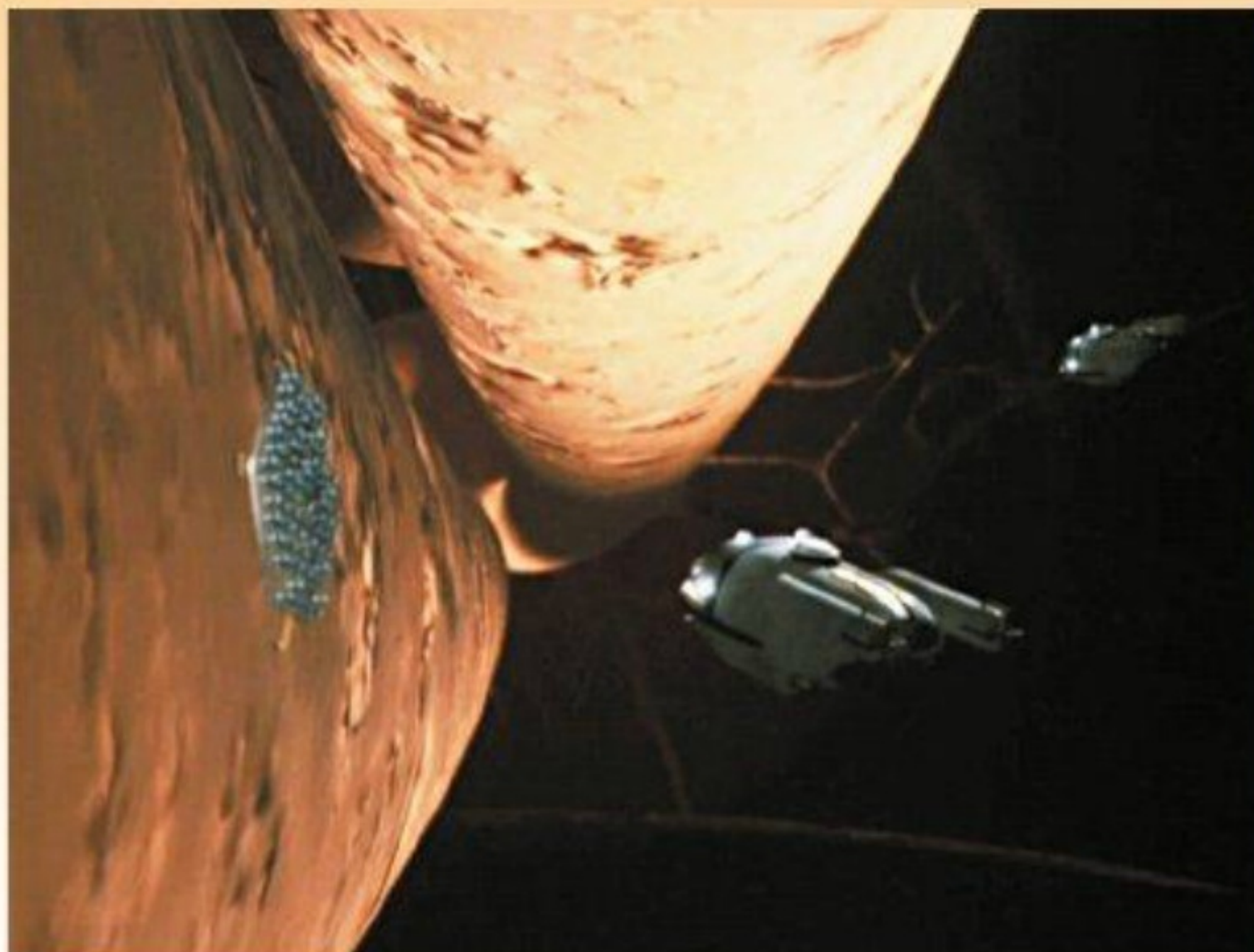
the storyline proceeds in predictable fashion and Davis' wooden line readings drain menace from his performance. Still, there are some suspenseful moments here (eg., an effectively unpleasant recreation of the Richard Speck nurse murders) and some good performances, notably by Eilbacher and Geoffrey Lewis as Stacy's shyster lawyer. Kelly Preston and PLAYBOY Playmates Jeana Tomasina and Ola Ray also appear. Director J. Lee Thompson and Bronson collaborated on five more productions that decade, including the similarly perverse **KINJITE: FORBIDDEN SUBJECTS** (1989).

The 1.85:1 image is occasionally marred by the grain and haze found in many early '80s productions, but looks clean and accurate overall; the no-frills mono sound is fine. English, French, and Spanish subtitles are included, along with a theatrical trailer (that shows the ending no less than *five times*), and DVD promo spots for other MGM releases. A standard version (which opens up the top and bottom of the frame while dropping nothing from the sides) can be found on Side 2.

ANTIBODY

2002, Velocity Home
Entertainment, DD-2.0/SS/MA/+,
\$24.98, 90m 26s, DVD-1
By John Charles

FANTASTIC VOYAGE and **INNERSPACE** were the obvious inspirations for this above-average DTV science fiction thriller, shot in Bulgaria. Lance Henriksen stars as FBI bomb disposal expert Gaynes, who makes a bad judgment call during a case, resulting in the deaths of several people. The perpetrator he ordered shot had a detonator secured inside his body that activated when the man's vital signs ceased. The government,



It's a fantastic voyage through innerspace as miniaturized scientists try to deactivate an implanted nuclear detonator in ANTIBODY.

however, is unwilling to let this information go public, using Gaynes as a convenient fall guy. One year later, he is pressed back into service when a nuclear crisis threatens all of Europe. Terrorist leader Moran (Julian Vergov) has an identical detonation device implanted that will automatically activate a devastating bomb either at the moment of his death or within 18 hours. A gun battle leaves the suspect in critical condition, so Gaynes and a team of experts (led by Robin Givens) are *miniaturized* and injected into Moran to find and disarm it. Time is running out, however, and keeping Moran's rapidly deteriorating body alive will not be easy, as any kind of electrical charge inflicted upon it will trigger the explosive. The production design is undernourished, the badly looped supporting players are a distraction, and the script is barely adequate. However, as proven by the two earlier pictures, this is a reliably entertaining premise and the CGI effects are sufficiently good (particularly when depicting the

inevitable white blood cell attack). Director/editor Christian McIntire also appears briefly as FBI Agent Roth, apparently an in-joke reference to the movie's prolific co-producer, Phillip Roth.

The standard presentation looks slightly soft but passable and the stereo mix is reasonably aggressive. A very short promo spot and a Spanish dubtrack are included.

BELPHEGOR— PHANTOM OF THE LOUVRE

*Belphegor, le fantome
du louvre*
2001, TVA International (Canada),
DD-5.1 & 2.0/16:9/LB/+,
C\$14.95, 96m 31s, DVD-1
By John Charles

This lavish French remake of a beloved 1965 TV miniseries seems to owe at least as much in approach to the 1999 Hollywood version of **THE MUMMY**. Sophie Marceau plays an adventurous shop owner whose apartment is next door to The Louvre. When a construction



VAMPYROS LESBOS' Soledad Miranda made her final screen appearance in the crazy spy thriller, *THE DEVIL CAME FROM AKASAVA*.

crew performs work on her building, she is able to sneak inside the museum one evening and is possessed by a spirit. This coincides with appearances by a mysterious cloaked figure who haunts the premises by night, causing damage and scaring guards into an early grave by turning their worst fears against them. An aged police officer (Michel Serrault), who investigated similar incidents at the museum during the late 1960s, is brought out of retirement to get to the bottom of it all. The film tries to be light and witty but is merely lumbering and obvious, with gratuitous CGI and a limp finale. Julie Christie (as an Egyptologist keen on solving the mystery) and grand location work are the only assets.

The anamorphic 2.35:1 presentation looks excellent, boasting strong hues and excellent detail. The French audio is offered in both 5.1 and 2.0 and the mixes deliver all that one would expect. Unfortunately, there are no subtitle options, so unilingual

viewers will have to make due with a mediocre 2.0 English dubtrack (Marceau and Christie provide their own voices, thankfully). A "Making Of..." (44m 2s) covers the basics and interviews various personnel (including director Jean-Paul Salome), but English speaking viewers are again out of luck with no subs or voiceover translation. English and French trailers are also included. The all-region Korean import from Starmax lacks the documentary but does include English subs, making it the choice for unilingual viewers wanting the original version.

THE DEVIL CAME FROM AKASAVA

Der Teufel kam aus Akasawa

1970, Image Entertainment,

DD-1.0/ST, \$19.99,

83m 30s, DVD-1

By Tim Lucas

The English titles of this German-language print contain no such reference, but some sources

attribute this Jess Franco spy thriller to Edgar Wallace's story "Akasavas"—the first chapter of his popular 1911 book SANDERS OF THE RIVER (filmed in 1935 with Paul Robeson); thus, the absence here of Commissioner Sanders indicates that certain liberties were taken. When a mineralogist (Angel Menéndez) discovers a radioactive stone capable of transforming base metals into gold, it lights a wick of intrigue that begins with the stone's theft by powerful private interests; the arrival of the scientist's inquisitive nephew ("Fred Williams" aka Wilhelm Friedrich Löcherer), who embarks on an affair with the wife (Ewa Stroemberg) of a prominent surgeon (Horst Tappert); and the convergence of various Scotland Yard and British Secret Service representatives. Among these are pompous Sir Philip (Siegfried Schürenberg, usually "Sir John" in the Wallace *krimis*), the gracefully middle-aged Lambert (Alberto Dalbes), Italian spy Tito Celli (Franco himself), and ravishing Jane Morgan ("Susann Korda" aka Soledad Miranda, in her final screen appearance), who defends crown and country by slutting around Europe and stripping nightly at the Red Rose nightclub. Howard Vernon, Paul Müller and Walter Rilla round out the cast.

Mildly enlivened by bouncy, sitar-driven tracks from the VAMPYROS LESBOS SEXADELIC DANCE PARTY album (including the "Nights in White Satin" rip-off), this is a half-hearted—or, perhaps, broken-hearted—Franco title with the sloppy complexion of a film never properly finished but released anyway. It's of interest only for Miranda's allure and provocative dancing, Franco's supporting role, and a funny scene of Miranda and Dalbes trying to furtively dispose of a

corpse and getting noticed by everybody. Licensed from Cine-International, the disc is in German with removable English subtitles and standard-framed. When viewed this way, it looks badly framed and cropped, but when the subtitles are removed and the image is zoomed to 1.85 on a widescreen set, the film looks more elegantly composed—too bad the disc can't be watched this way with the subtitles on! An alternate Spanish cut also exists, minus the nudity, which credits Miranda under her own name.

THE DEVIL COMMANDS

1941, Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment, DD-2.0/ST/CC/+, \$24.95, 64m 22s, DVD-1

By Kim Newman

Like **THE UNDYING MONSTER** (1942) and **WEIRD WOMAN** (1943), **THE DEVIL COMMANDS** is unusual for a 1940s quickie in that it's adapted from a contemporary horror novel. Though the source (William Sloane's **THE EDGE OF RUNNING WATER**) is severely compressed to fit a B picture running time, the picture has more complexities and ambition than the run-of-the-mill Boris Karloff "mad scientist" programmer. The show also benefits from the direction of ambitious tyro Edward Dmytryk, who had **CAPTIVE WILD WOMAN** (1943) to come before *noir* hits like **MURDER, MY SWEET** (1944) and **CROSSFIRE** (1947) put him (temporarily) on the A-list.

Dr. Julian Blair (Karloff) has developed an electrical helmet which can translate brain-waves to a print-out graph. When his wife dies, he has a notion that the device can also contact the dead, whose minds apparently linger. Hooking up with a fraudulent medium (Anne Revere), Blair moves to a clifftop house and

works obsessively, making unethical uses of body-snatched corpses as "batteries" to power his contraption and exciting the predictable resentment of the townsfolk. Karloff goes from benevolent if absent-minded to cracked, but Revere is the major villain, though she doesn't last to the busy, crackling finale. The last reel suffers especially from a rush through Sloane's final chapters, to the point where it's hard to work out exactly what is going on, but the film has an offbeat mad lab, with helmeted corpses bowing towards a vortex of energy.

Columbia's no-frills DVD showcases an okay rather than impeccable transfer (a greyish flicker on the right side of the screen mars many shadowy scenes). The only extras are a couple of irrelevant recent horror trailers, though there are subtitles in French and English. For the (somewhat steep) price, one of Karloff's other Columbia mad doctor pictures (**THE MAN THEY**

COULD NOT HANG, THE MAN WITH NINE LIVES, BEFORE I HANG) ought to have been included as a co-feature.

THE DEVIL'S PARTNER

1958/61, Alpha Video, DD-2.0, \$7.98, 73m 8s, DVD-0

By John Charles

Made in 1958 by director Charles R. Rondeau, this independent production was eventually acquired by Roger Corman, who released it through his company, The Filmgroup, in 1961. Crazy old coot Pete Jensen (Ed Nelson) dies after performing a Satanic ritual in his rundown shack. Shortly thereafter, the man's handsome young nephew Nick Richards (also Nelson) arrives in the small town of Furnace Flats and a series of mysterious events occur: a man with a normal heart drops dead from a coronary, a docile dog horribly mauls its owner, and a doctor visiting from out-of-town dies in a bizarre traffic accident. Nick (who never

*Boris Karloff uses science to re-establish communication with his dead wife in **THE DEVIL COMMANDS**.*



sweats, despite the 100° summer heat) is the author of these tragedies, but to what end? With its modest budget (do not expect anything remotely as fantastical as the maniacal centaur and torch bearing hellion pictured on the poster and Alpha's cover art) and a comparative lack of incident, **THE DEVIL'S PARTNER** is strictly second bill material, but not without interest. The performances are competent across the board (the always-welcome Edgar Buchanan plays the local general practitioner) and sequences depicting the occult ceremonies are fairly intense and bloody for the time. Composer Ronald Stein contributes an intermittently eerie score, with some nice theremin interludes.

The 35mm source materials have plenty of scratches and speckles, along with a few disruptive breaks. A brief blank spot also heralds each reel change. Image quality is reasonably good, however, and the audio has no serious drawbacks.

GIRLS WHO LIKE GIRLS

2001, Image Entertainment, DD-1.0/LB/+, \$24.99, 89m 2s, DVD-1

By Richard Harland Smith

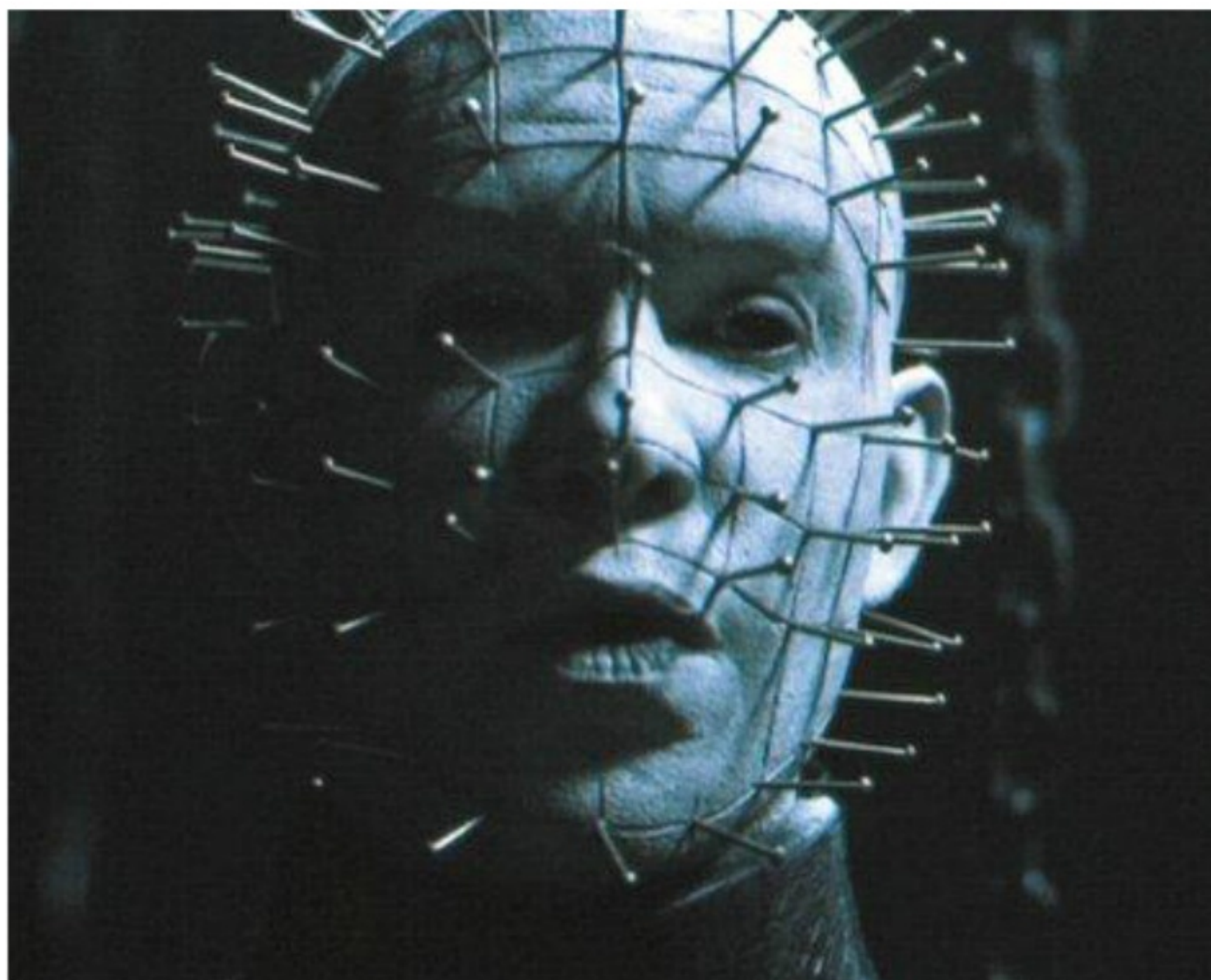
This compilation is presented as a documentary on the evolution of girl-on-girl action in the cinema, from its origins as male spectacle (lesbian sex as foreplay to heterosexual coupling) to its fulfillment as a celebration of unapologetic Sapphic sexuality. Because the clips on hand are licensed exclusively from Audubon Films, it is of dubious historic value, restricted to 13 titles—nearly half the work of Radley Metzger. Apart from Metzger, a proper history of this subject would not have neglected such gay icons as Louise Brooks, Marlene Dietrich and Joan Crawford, pioneer lesbian film directors as Dorothy Azner and Germaine Dulac, and such landmark films (love 'em or hate 'em) as **THE**

CHILDREN'S HOUR, **NIGHT OF THE IGUANA**, **THE FOX**, **THE BITTER TEARS OF PETRA VON KANT** and **THE KILLING OF SISTER GEORGE**—to say nothing of the sub-genre of European lesbian vampire films.

Failing as both cultural history (a categorization to which it clearly aspires) and film history (a skinny dipping scene from Dwain Esper's **MARIJUANA** is duplicitously passed off as a naïve Hollywood attempt at depicting lesbian relationships), **GIRLS WHO LIKE GIRLS** is at least entertaining and certainly works as eye candy. Betty Ward's narration feels occasionally script-bound but does land a couple of snarky asides. The clips are not always in optimum condition, looking occasionally damaged or washed-out. Excerpts from Metzger's **SCORE** (featuring strap-on sex play between actresses Claire Wilbur and Lynn Lowry) have been culled from the more explicit "hot" version, while

Girls who like girls are bound to enjoy the Audubon Films compendium, GIRLS WHO LIKE GIRLS.





Even Doug Bradley's customary cameo as Pinhead fails to spike the wearisome HELLRAISER: HELLSEEKER.

the chapter on **THERESE AND ISABELLE** compares Metzger's original ending with the more upbeat *denouement* demanded by his French producers (which depicts its grown-up narrator consigned to a proper middle-class marriage). The disc has 16 chapters (each film merits its own chapter stop) and a 2m 3s "theatrical trailer."

HELLRAISER: HELLSEEKER

2001, Dimension Home Video,
DD-5.1/MA/16:9/LB/ST/CC/+,
\$29.99, 88m 39s, DVD-1

By John Charles

Five sequels down the line, the HELLRAISER series is now little more than a mainstream distillation of Clive Barker's original themes and obsessions. In a veritable reprise of its predecessor, **HELLRAISER: INFERNO** [VW 69:15], the storyline centers around hallucinations being suffered by corporate worker Trevor (Dean Winters), following a car accident

that took the life of his wife (Ashley Laurence, reprising her character from the first three installments). The police, however, were never able to find her body and mounting evidence suggests that she was actually a victim of premeditated murder. Trevor's strange visions imply that he may be the culprit and the authorities begin to agree. Neither the shock sequences, the character, nor Winters' performance are very remarkable and, although the finale does a nice job of tying-up loose ends, it is little reparation for the plodding and uninvolved build-up. Once again, Pinhead (Doug Bradley) is reduced to cameo status, while the other Cenobites lurk around the background of a few shots, contributing virtually nothing to the scenario or the atmosphere.

The anamorphic 1.83:1 presentation of this Vancouver-lensed production looks good and the 5.1 mix gets the job

done, though the rear channels are largely silent. Director Rick Bota (who has already helmed *two more HELLRAISER* sequels in the interim) can be heard on a decent commentary track, discussing how the project evolved, the challenges dictated by a tight schedule and budget, and the "silver retention" process utilized to give the film a more distinctive look. Bota also inadvertently made an extra's paycheck \$3000 higher because he gave the man direction personally, a no-no under Canadian union rules. Three alternate scenes (with optional commentary) and a very brief effects documentary are also included, along with four promo spots for other pictures.

JESSE JAMES MEETS FRANKENSTEIN'S DAUGHTER

1966, Elite Entertainment,
DD-2.0/MA/16:9/LB/+,
82m 59s, \$19.95, DVD-0

By Bill Cooke

Here we go with another co-production between Elite Entertainment and The National Film Museum—a team-up that doesn't inspire a lot of confidence after three "Drive-In Double Feature" discs that featured shoddy transfers of ragged public domain favorites, despite a claim to be "dedicated to the preservation and restoration of our national and international motion picture heritage." Their presentation of **JESSE JAMES MEETS FRANKENSTEIN'S DAUGHTER**—once part of a Horror-Western double bill that co-featured **BILLY THE KID VS. DRACULA**, and the final film of prolific journeyman director William "One-Shot" Beaudine—is lacking resolution, color-faded (only Estelita Rodriguez'

red dress really stands out), and contrast is so high that white clothing appears radioactive. 16:9 enhancement matters little, considering, but the 1.85:1 framing looks surprisingly comfortable throughout.

The real draw here is an audio commentary by "World's foremost drive-in movie critic" Joe Bob Briggs, his second for Elite after **I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE**. The Texas journalist/comedian enthuses for the full 83m over the careers of Beaudine ("Don't judge by this one!") and the actors (most of whom never made another film after this "résumé killer"), offers historical nuggets on the real Jesse James ("The Yasser Arafat of rednecks") and takes good-humored pot-shots ("I think this is officially the part that drags in the middle"). The only real sour note is when he criticizes Beaudine's endless medium shots during a scene that is actually rife with cutaways. The film itself is tedious and lifeless, as were previous Horror-Westerns **TEENAGE MONSTER** (1957) and **CURSE OF THE UNDEAD** (1959); however, Franken-philes might appreciate how it anticipates the female mad scientist of the superior **LADY FRANKENSTEIN** and the bald muscleman monster of Hammer's unfortunate **HORROR OF FRANKENSTEIN**; for plot details and a fuller assessment of the film's weaknesses, see John Charles' review of the far superior, full-frame MGM tape [VW 79:8]. Elite's disc is afforded 8 chapter stops and when you select menu items, you're greeted by Joe Bob sound bites like "Here's your theatrical trailer," "I got your audio options right here" and, upon selecting the commentary, "Good damn choice!"

MIDNIGHT MANHUNT

1945, Alpha Video, DD-2.0, \$7.98, 62m 25s, DVD-0

By John Charles

Though the storyline and cast suggest Monogram or PRC, this enjoyable whodunit actually hails from Paramount. When the body of notorious trigger man Joe Wells turns up in the alley outside The Last Gangster Wax Museum and disappears shortly thereafter, rival newshounds/ex-sweethearts Sue Gallagher (**DETOUR**'s Ann Savage) and Pete Willis (**STRANGE IMPERSONATION**'s William Gargan) smell an exclusive. Sue is so determined to score points with her editor, she moves the corpse so that her photographer can get some snaps of it before any of the competitors. Unfortunately for her, Jelke (George Zucco), the man responsible for plugging the victim in the first place, follows the bloodstains to Sue's apartment above the museum. Confronted with a pistol in her face, she agrees to take Jelke to the body, but it is no longer where she left it. In fact, ensuing events reveal Joe Wells to be remarkably mobile for a dead man. Savage and Gargan do well in their time-honored roles, matching wits with impatient editors and flatfoots, while also trying to outsmart cool-headed assassin Zucco. Leo Gorcey ("I figured this whole thing out through the process of mental reduction") co-stars as the museum's handyman, whose hair-brained schemes prevent his highly stressed boss (Charles Halton) from getting some desperately needed sleep. William C. Thomas (**I COVER BIG TOWN**) directed.

The transfer of this public domain feature is soft, dupey, and grainy, with ample wear and several perturbing breaks in the 16mm TV source materials. Most

distractingly of all, a hair waves around the left side of the screen for a couple of minutes during the final reel. The audio is merely adequate and there are no extras.

MIDNIGHT WHISPERS

Sasayaki

1999, Kino on Video, DD-2.0/LB/ST/+, \$29.95, 100m 9s, DVD-0

By Tim Lucas

A live action Japanese film based on Masahiko Kikuni's manga *GEKKO NO SASAYAKI*, this film is best approached without any foreknowledge whatsoever, so it's a challenging title to review without spoiling. It begins as the innocent story of two high school students, Hidaka (Kenji Mizuhashi) and Satsuki (Tsugumi), who meet in *kendo* class and are shyly attracted to one another. ("I like it when she hits me on the head," Hidaka confides to a friend.) Upon discovering their mutual attraction, Hidaka celebrates by ceremoniously burning all of his "false Satsukis," the photos he has surreptitiously taken of her deflected face and strong, athletic legs. But when Hidaka finally beds his "unattainable" dream girl, her reality doesn't move him as profoundly as his fantasy; so he returns to a humiliating worship of her. When Satsuki discovers a tape recording that Hidaka secretly made of her using the toilet, she brands him a pervert and breaks off their relationship. Unable to force an end to his dog-like devotion, she decides to punish him for breaking her heart by making him observe her dates with their *kendo* instructor (Kouta Kusano), in and out of bed, until her innate sadism becomes as apparent as his inherent masochism.

Some viewers will likely find Akihiko Shiota's film sick or at



Two teenagers unexpectedly find themselves involved in a sado-masochistic relationship in MIDNIGHT WHISPERS.

least sad, but we found it surprisingly moving and unique in believably depicting how a sado-masochistic relationship begins, how these tendencies are initially manifested in people who may abhor them, and most importantly, how sexual behavior that seems aberrant when viewed from outside can be absolutely and mutually loving within the relationship itself. After building to a potentially tragic climax, the movie ends with a surprisingly sweet coda that works as a metaphor for the give-and-take dynamics that exist in any affair of the heart.

Kino's letterboxed (1.75:1) disc of this award-winning Nikkatsu production is disappointingly non-anamorphic and the positioning of the subtitles prevents one from amplifying the image for widescreen monitor viewing. The image quality is also somewhat dark and impure, showing some distance from the original negative. The delicate stereo mix is appealing,

especially in its summonings of gentle rainfall, and the English subtitles are removable. A theatrical trailer (2:40) is included, as is a 15m 35s interview with the film's young director, who admits to some masochism in his own character and to the challenge his film poses to American audiences. He says he will be pleased if only "20 to 30 out of 100 [audience members] could share my ideas"—our kind of guy.

THE PORNOGRAPHERS

Jinruigako Nyumon

1966, Criterion, DD-1.0/16:9/LB/ST, \$29.95, 127m 27s, DVD-0

By Tim Lucas

This B&W Nikkatsu production—directed by Shohei Imamura (**THE BALLAD OF NARAYAMA**)—is less about pornography or its manufacture than society's hypocritical view of what constitutes immorality. This tragic black comedy is about "Subu" Ogata (Shoichi Ozawa), a 40ish medical supplies salesman whose

failing business drives him into making and peddling 8mm porn loops and surveillance audiotapes of his neighbors having sex. In a narrative that flashes back to his 30s and the sad/sweet origins of his common law marriage to the widowed Haru (Sumiko Sakamoto), Subu is presently enmeshed in the bizarre situation of living with his adopted family in a waterfront shack with a large, aquarium-bound carp (Haru believes the large, glum-faced fish is the reincarnation of her late husband), tolerating Haru's physical intimacies with her coddled, college-aged son (Masaomi Kondo) and developing an unmanageable lust of his own for Haru's 15 year-old daughter (Keiko Sakawa). While his business corrupts no one not already corrupted (in fact, the fantasies most common among his clientele are marked by some element of innocence), Subu's personal contempt for pornography and the "dirty, stupid" people who use it denies him



*A Japanese businessman succumbs to his repressed attraction to his stepdaughter in **THE PORNOGRAPHERS**.*

a useful outlet for his rising demons. Similarly, his family's shocked reaction to the discovery of his secret source of income propels them to more disturbing fates. A coda (which may have influenced **FELLINI'S CASANOVA**, 1975) finds Subu, in his 50s and far less recognizably human, pursuing a frightening abstraction of his sexual ideal to the exclusion of all else.

Rich in situations, seedy characters, stylistic setpieces and surf music outbursts that today's audiences think of as "Lynchian," **THE PORNOGRAPHERS** has been brought to DVD in a hi-def, dual layered, anamorphic (2.31:1) presentation, which allows its sterling B&W scope photography to produce one or two startlingly dimensional effects. There are a couple of rough reel changes and some Japanese dialogue under the main titles is denied translation (the credits are being subtitled instead), but these are minor gripes. The only extra is Nikkatsu's advance trailer (3m 11s), which includes shots and glimpses of scenes not included in Imamura's final

cut. A widescreen transfer is also available on VHS from Home Vision Entertainment, also priced at \$29.95.

THE RETURN OF SWAMP THING

1989, Image Entertainment, DD-5.1 & 2.0/DTS/MA/16:9/LB/+, \$19.98, 87m 7s, DVD-1

By John Charles

Although he seemed definitively dispatched at the conclusion of **SWAMP THING** [VW 65:61], loony Dr. Arcane (Louis Jourdan) somehow managed to regain human form and is back wreaking more havoc. Arcane's stepdaughter, horticulturist Abigail (Heather Locklear, whose atrocious performance netted her a Razzie Award), pays an unexpected visit to his remote laboratory in the hopes of discovering how her mother died. Arcane is delighted to play host, as the girl's DNA will be perfect for his rejuvenation experiments. Fortunately for her, Mr. Tall Dark and Mossy (Dick Durock, inhabiting a much improved suit this time) lumbers back from the bog to

gum up the works. While fans of the Moore/Bissette comic book will no doubt be appalled, this aggressively campy, shoddily scripted sequel movZes along well enough and generates a few chuckles along the way. Steve Neill's farcically gruesome make-up, a montage of original **SWAMP THING** comic artwork, and Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Born in the Bayou" help immensely.

The 1.78:1 presentation is impressive for a small budget effort, marred only by a few random speckles, and restores image content to the sides that was previously sacrificed by RCA/Columbia's old P&S transfer. The film was originally mixed in the rudimentary Ultra Stereo process and that is included here, along with revamped Dolby Digital 5.1 and DTS versions. While bass is on the light side, the sound field is not bad and the rear channels are used effectively. Director Jim Wynorski remembers a great deal about the production and shares a number of interesting anecdotes in a rewarding commentary. Additional extras consist of the trailer for Miramax's



Dick Durock rises from the mire to sabotage Louis Jourdan's quest for immortality in THE RETURN OF SWAMP THING.

limited theatrical release, a 5m promo reel (which features Durock's real voice), 6 "TV spots" (mislabelled promo clips given to TV stations), a still and lobby gallery, and two Greenpeace Public Service Announcements featuring Swampy.

STACY

2001, Synapse Films,
DD-2.0/16:9/LB/ST/+,
\$24.95, 79m 51s, DVD-1

By John Charles

Girls aged 15 to 17 begin to die of an unknown malady, only to rise again as bloodthirsty zombies nicknamed "Stacies." Only total bodily dismemberment ("Repeat Kills" carried out by The Romero Troops) is effective and victims about to succumb to the phenomenon display an uncontrollable euphoria known as "Near Death Happiness." For those who do not want to deal with The Romeros, an illegal gang of Drews (named after Drew Barrymore) are willing to come and perform the Repeat Kills for a price. Puppeteer Shibukawa (Toshinori Omi) is

befriended by Eiko (Natsuki Kato), who is destined to die within a week and wants him to be the one who chops her up. Meanwhile, a facility dedicated to zombie experimentation is invaded by dozens of Stacies, thanks to the actions of a deranged soldier.

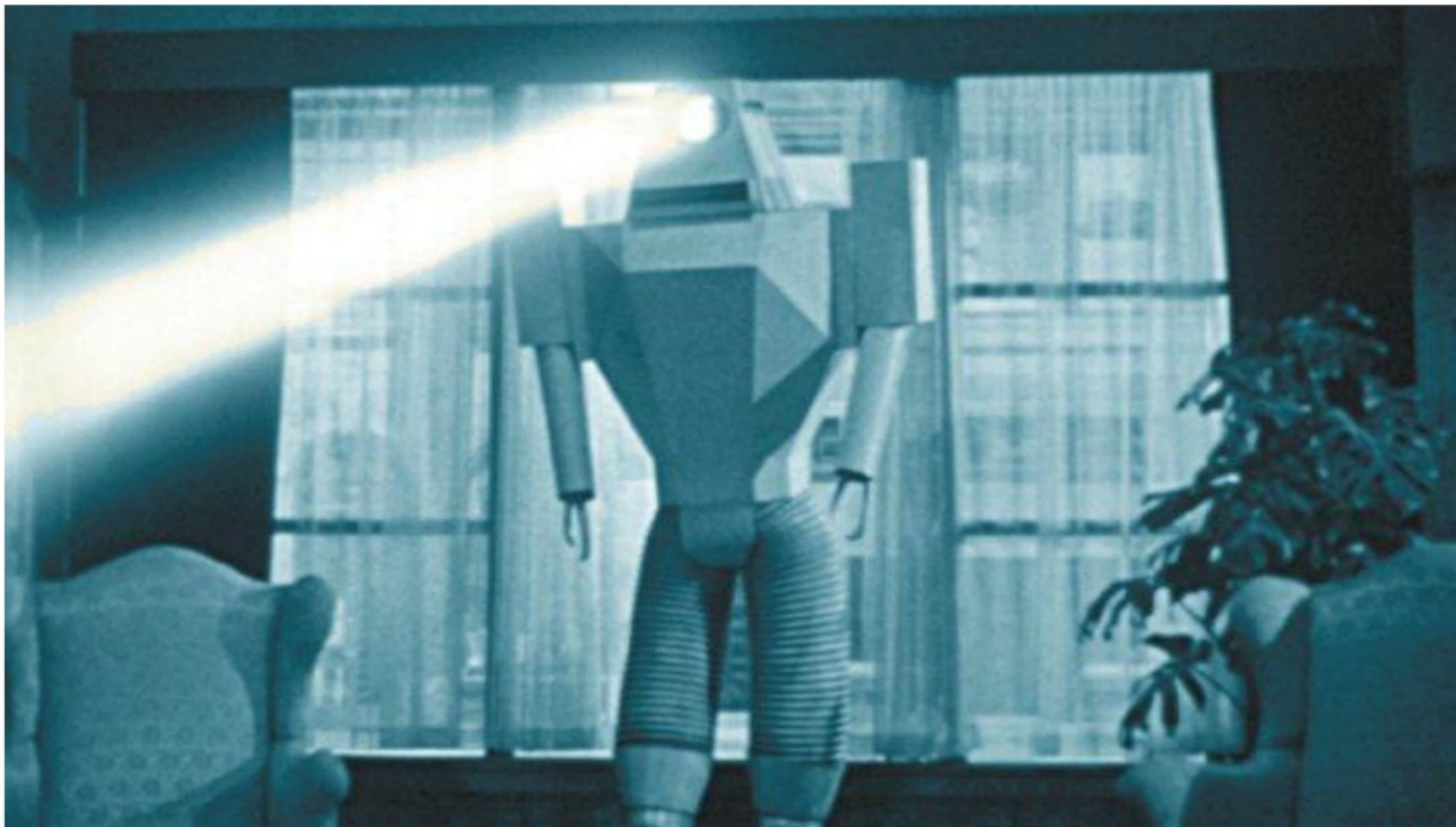
Even amongst the exceedingly curious annals of Japanese cinema, it is difficult to think of anything like this one! Based on

a novel by Kenji Otsuki (who appears in a commercial pitching a designer chainsaw called "Bruce Campbell's Right Hand 2"), this busy low-budget splatter comedy/romance/satire is a thoroughly bizarre enterprise that will alienate most viewers. Director Naoyuki Tomomatsu (who comes from an adult video background) amps everything up so high that a few scenes become almost unbearably exasperating. On the other hand, some scattered sentimental moments are strangely affecting (like a private puppet show that Shibukawa puts on for Eiko), the finale is unexpected and novel, and gorehounds get more than their share of bloody carnage. While most of the zombie movie in-jokes are sophomoric, the satire aimed at local obsessions (namely, schoolgirl fetishes and preoccupation with unnatural, unobtainable women) is indelible and unique.

The digital video 1.78:1 image looks handsome and the cheaply edited stereo mix is sufficiently boisterous. Optional English subtitles are provided, along with a trailer, and useful liner notes by Patrick Macias.

The EVIL DEAD series and George A. Romero's zombie trilogy are among the targets dismembered in the bizarre Japanese production, STACY.





The robots wear shoulder pads in Herman Cohen's Venusian invasion opus, TARGET EARTH.

TARGET EARTH

1954, VCI Entertainment,
DD-2.0/MA/LB/+, \$19.99,
74m 56s, DVD-0

By Tim Lucas

An adaptation of Paul W. Fairman's IF story "The Deadly City" by future AIP prez James Nicholson and **MONSTER FROM THE OCEAN FLOOR** director Wyott Ordung, **TARGET EARTH** was producer Herman Cohen's first American independent production. Four people unconscious overnight (as opposed to sleeping) awaken to find their metropolis evacuated and newly policed by an advance guard of death ray-dealing robots from the planet Venus. The characters—the Richard Denning hero, the sweet but troubled heroine (Kathleen Crowley), the tough guy (Richard Reeves), the liquor-lovin' floozy (Virginia Grey) and, eventually, the gun-waving loose cannon (Robert Roark) who upsets the cast's sexual balance—anticipate the principals of Roger

Corman's more visionary **DAY THE WORLD ENDED**, made two years later; the movie cuts back and forth between their escalating tensions and a group of Army scientists (led by Whit Bissell, in his first job for Cohen) examining a defunct robot to discover its Achilles heel. Working with very little, first-time director Sherman A. Rose acquits himself well, pulling off an especially good opening reel, beginning with an extended shot recalling the character-describing pan that opens **REAR WINDOW** (1953), and continuing without dialogue for the first 9m. Unfortunately, the rest is nearly all talk, leavened with the usual military mobilization stock footage and little original action. Not a key work of '50s science fiction, but the absence of atmospheric casting permits a more generous than usual view of vintage studio sets and locations that no longer exist.

The 16:9 transfer crops to 1.85:1 an open-framed picture meant to be matted in

projection to 1.66—sometimes conspicuously so. The enlargement also results in a constant grainy texture that makes cheating still frames of the vacant city stand out as what they are. In his audio commentary (carried over from a 1996 laserdisc release by The Roan Group), Herman Cohen initially cites the film's budget as "under \$100,000," then as \$87,000; one can't help wondering how much lower he might have gone, had the film lasted another reel. The film was shot in 7 days, it has a B-picture length, the cast was minimal and inexpensive, the scenes were filmed either on redressed studio sets or Los Angeles locations, and the entire invasion was staged with a single robot built in Cohen's home garage! Cohen's talk is amiable but sparse and mostly of the "we sure had a great time making it" persuasion. He also wanders far afield of the subject at hand, eventually encouraging listeners to make movies of their own—



Howard Vernon as the revolutionary Pedro in Jess Franco's X-312 FLIGHT TO HELL.

but he's gone now and the talk stands as a time capsule of his warm and gregarious personality. Tom Weaver and Didier Chatelain's fine "video tribute" to Cohen (also on the **HORRORS OF THE BLACK MUSEUM** disc, reviewed last issue) is repeated here, and a theatrical trailer (2m 9s) and other minor extras are included.

X-312 FLIGHT TO HELL

X-312 Flug zur Hölle

1970, Image Entertainment,
DD-1.0/LB/ST, \$19.99,
84m 22s, DVD-1

By Tim Lucas

Made by Jess Franco in the wake of Soledad Miranda's death as part of his contract with German producer Artur Brauner, this cheap jungle thriller is more entertaining than you might expect. Thomas Hunter stars as an American news correspondent who must exit Chile aboard an old plane

with several other passengers when the government is overthrown. Buying himself aboard at the last minute is Ruprecht (Siegfried Schürenberg, looking like a slumming Vladimir Nabokov), former president of the Chilean national bank, who is carrying several millions in stolen gems. In a fairly well-faked scene, an attempted highjacking crashes the plane in the Matto Grosso jungle, where greedy air steward Bob Gonzales (Fernando Sancho, with a huge lip sore that makes you sorry for the actresses who had to kiss him) steals the gems and commits two murders to cover his tracks. The group further diminish in number as they encounter a violent Indio tribe, a group of music-loving revolutionaries led by Pedro (Howard Vernon) and his lesbian moll Lolita (Beni Cardoso), and finally, mysterious crime boss Carrasco (Paul Müller). Especially amusing is the love triangle between

languages expert Carlos (Hans Hass, Jr.), wide-eyed woman-child Steffi (Gila von Weiserschausen) and her teddy bear; the scene in which she makes her teddy dance to a kooky lounge song on the radio, intercut with stock footage of monkeys tenderly smiling from the trees as though deeply touched, is Franco dementia at its craziest. Ewa Stroemberg, Antonio de Cabo and (briefly) Franco himself also star.

Though an English-dubbed master of this film exists and has been issued on VHS in Holland, this is the West German version with removable English subtitles, which contains a fair amount of nudity (mostly by voluptuous Esperanza Roy) for a story that really doesn't call for any. The picture, evidently sourced from a PAL tape of a 35mm positive print, is minimally letterboxed (1.52:1) and looks only so-so; the mono audio is okay. *Viva Franco!* 🐾



The Film Bulletin Reviews, 1969-1974



*Will Mary Tyler Moore stay married to the King of Kings—or settle for the King? Find out in **CHANGE OF HABIT**.*

cutesy performance. Jane Elliott, in her first film, registers most effectively, while Miss McNair gives a grim interpretation of a grim character. Notable in the supporting cast are Regis Toomey as a reactionary parish priest, Edward Asner as a non-violent cop, Richard Carlson as an understanding bishop and Timothy Carey, the memorable skinny psychopath of Kubrick's **THE KILLING** and many a B-thriller, as a fat, greedy storekeeper. Nefti Millet is okay as a problem teenager who eventually attacks Miss Moore in her bed. Exhibitors should not be astonished at the likelihood of complaints about **CHANGE OF HABIT**'s G rating, which is somewhat out of place on a film dealing with ghetto violence, heroin addiction and the attempted rape of a nun, however sugar-coated the handling.

1969. Universal. Technicolor. 93 minutes. Elvis Presley, Mary Tyler Moore. Barbara McNair, Jane Elliott. Produced by Joe Connelly. Directed by William Graham.

Elvis Presley reportedly turned down an offer to star in **MIDNIGHT COWBOY** in order to play Dr. John Carpenter in this movie, available on VHS and DVD from Universal. One of the songs he performs here is "Rubberneckin'," which topped the dance charts in a remix version in 2003. Thankyouverymuch.

THE HAWAIIANS

Sequel to Michener's **HAWAII** is handsomely produced, but uneven. Fame of novel, Charlton Heston, promise of exotic adventure (though only modestly realized) should lure good response in broad range of markets. Rated GP.

The second half of James Michener's **HAWAII** (the first part was filmed as the 1966 UA roadshow of that title) forms the basis of **THE HAWAIIANS**, a reasonably interesting but uneven generational saga set in the latter 1800s. The current United Artists release lacks the epic scale of its predecessor, concentrating instead on character delineation, at which it is only fitfully successful. However, the scope and attractiveness of the production, the presence of Charlton Heston, the fame of the Michener novel and the promise of exotic adventure should add up to well-above-average grosses in all markets.

Heston is the only big name in the cast but it's Chinese actress Tina Chen who walks off with

acting honors in a difficult role, which takes her from innocent ingenue to iron-willed matriarch of a burgeoning Hawaiian dynasty. Director Tom Gries (**WILL PENNY**) stages the action against natural backgrounds of immense beauty, expertly location-filmed by Phil Lathrop and Lucien Ballard, and handles the surface complexities of James R. Webb's fairly predictable, character-laden adaptation with intelligence and clarity—at least until the final third, when interest wanes, grinding finally to an abrupt and unsatisfying conclusion. Second-billed Geraldine Chaplin is seldom onscreen and can do little with her vague part as Heston's cold wife, while John Philip Law doesn't put in an appearance until the last and weakest section of the film.

Heston is effectively cast as the brutal shipmaster's son of the Richard Harris character in the previous film, who returns to Honolulu from China to find his father has died and left him barren land instead of the ships he expected. Brought over in the filthy, crowded hold of Heston's ship as cheap labor, Chinese worker Mako "adopts" Miss Chen as his wife and goes to work for Heston. Miss Chen is told by Puntis sage Keye Luke that she will bear five sons for Mako, but that she will serve as their "aunt," since Mako's actual wife is still in China. Following the birth of her son, Miss Page becomes withdrawn and unresponsive even to the discovery of water on Heston's land. Dr. James Gregory indicates she may be going insane. Heston is denied a loan by the all-powerful group of missionary descendants who control the island, including such untrustworthy types as Alec McCowen and Lyle Bettger. Years pass, and Heston leads a foray into French Guyana to steal a pineapple crop from a heavily guarded plantation. Miss Chen discovers Mako has contracted leprosy, and leaves her children behind to go with him to the grim, murderous leper colony at the island of Molokai. Heston, now a prosperous pineapple baron, has taken his son away from the influence of Miss Chaplin, and sends the boy to sea, then falls in love with Japanese import Miko Mayama. The aging Miss Chen returns after Mako's death to chart her offspring on a business-wise course. Heston's plot to overthrow the Queen, Naomi Stevens, precipitates a bloodless revolution which installs McCowen as president of the Republic of Hawaii. Now grown, son John Phillip Law returns from sea after ten years and falls in love with Miss Chen's daughter Virginia Lee. Plague infects the island and the Chinese section has to

be burned to the ground. Heston and Miss Chen, who frowned on their children's marrying, see the light and all work together toward a better Hawaii.

Some inconsequential and inoffensive nudity is scattered throughout, as are such capable players as Harry Townes, Khigh Dheigh and Chris Robinson. Henry Mancini provides a serviceable score.

1970. United Artists (A Walter Mirisch Production). Deluxe Color, Panavision. 134 minutes. Charlton Heston, Geraldine Chaplin. John Phillip Law, Tina Chen, Mako. Alec McCowen. Produced by Walter Mirisch. Directed by Tom Gries.

*According to the Internet Movie Database (<http://us.imdb.com>), Victor Sen Yung and Bette Midler are among **THE HAWAIIANS'** uncredited cast members. It has never been issued on home video.*

NUMBER ONE

Charlton Heston as fading pro football star. Fails on both sports and dramatic levels and will have to settle for dual billing. Rated M.

Under the credit titles of **NUMBER ONE** is seen some footage from National Football League games. The switch to a patently unconvincing studio-staged game promptly sets the tone of artificiality that pervades this United Artists release. The disparity between the real and the make-believe is glaring, and sums up the failure of the entire effort, for **NUMBER ONE** emerges as a feature-length compendium of visual and verbal clichés which never begins to come to grips with the dramatic potential inherent in its story of age displaced by youth. The Walter Seltzer production, despite the presence of Charlton Heston, is destined for dual billing, since there is little sports action for football fans and less drama for other filmgoers. It is chock-full of contrivance and counterfeit dialogue, stiffly delivered by the entire cast, compounded by the sort of direction by Tom Gries which shows logs burning in the fireplace to indicate lust.

Charlton Heston is disappointingly emotionless as a veteran star quarterback for the New Orleans Saints, whose life on both the professional and personal level is crumbling. Booed by the fans and reprimanded by coach John Randolph for initiating his own unsuccessful plays, Heston finds his wife, Jessica Walter, drifting away from him to pursue a fashion-design career. Columnists hint at his retirement, ambitious younger



Charlton Heston's blood may bring immunity to a world succumbing to bacteriological mutation in THE OMEGA MAN.

players consider him used-up, he has an unsatisfying affair with another woman (Diana Muldaur), and is tempted to quit the Saints to work in data processing, since ex-player Bruce Dern became a successful businessman after leaving the game. David Moessinger's lethargically-paced, uneventful screenplay seldom achieves convincing drama, let alone the tragedy it aims for, and only faintly hints at the undercurrent of masochism which marks Heston's character ("Pain is the name of the game," he says). Heston's recurring doubts about his career status are unsubtly conveyed, to say the least, by repeated flashbacks of an angry fan yelling, "You're through!" The familiar set-pieces abound—a "wild party" scene, fashionable but ineffective slow-motion and split-screen effects, endless flashbacks to better times, a love scene full of cornball pseudo-artistic superimpositions, and the pointless introduction of musician Al Hirt to do his thing. Michael Hugo's location photography strives for realism but is frustrated by the script and numerous instances of second-rate optical work. Finally, Heston plays in the NFL season opener, determined to lead the team to victory, or die trying. He is cheered when he makes a touchdown, but three burly opponents crush him to the ground and he dies before the hushed crowd. The use of a completely dead soundtrack here is the picture's most effective touch.

1969. United Artists. Technicolor. 100 minutes. Charlton Heston, Jessica Walter, Bruce Dern. Produced by Walter Seltzer. Directed by Tom Gries.

NUMBER ONE has yet to make its touchdown on home video.

THE OMEGA MAN

Strong ballyhoo values in this sci-fi horror hokum pitting Charlton Heston against sub-human zombies. Good potential for saturation playoff in general markets action houses, drive-ins. interracial affair adds lure for black audiences. Rated GP.

THE OMEGA MAN is Charlton Heston, the last survivor of a bacteriological war which has destroyed most life on earth, doing nightly battle with an army of hooded, decaying mutants who regard him as the sole remnant of the military-technological age that brought the world to ruin. Nominally based on Richard Matheson's semi-classic science fiction novel *I AM LEGEND*, the screenplay by John and Joyce Corrington veers off on some wild tangents of its own which make the Warner Bros. release less acceptable for discriminating sci-fi devotees than as straightforward action entertainment for the mass audience. Loaded with exploitable elements, **THE OMEGA MAN** will fare best where given lively ballyhoo in saturation breaks. The interracial romance that develops between Heston and the last woman alive, Rosalind Cash, provides an extra angle to lure the black audience. Despite contrivances and plot loopholes which wouldn't have emerged had the film stuck to its source, director Boris Sagal holds attention by letting the inherently interesting basic situation provide most of the suspense, while injecting occasional bursts of violence.

Heston, at his craggiest, is a onetime scientist who believes himself to be the last human being



Don't worry, Chuck—he's an NRA member! From SKYJACKED.

alive in 1977 Los Angeles. During the day, he wanders streets littered with rotting corpses, talking to himself, pilfering items from abandoned stores and, in a nice sequence, running **WOODSTOCK** for himself in an empty theater, wistfully regarding its throngs of live young people. He has to return to his fortified penthouse apartment before nightfall, however, when the torch-wielding, dead-white light-sensitive creatures prowl the darkness figuring ways to kill him. Two other humans eventually show up, with-it black girl Rosalind Cash and hippie type Paul Koslo, both of whom rescue Heston from being set afire in a football stadium by "The Family," as the mutants, led by fanatical Anthony Zerbe, call themselves. Heston and Miss Cash fall for each other, natch, and he becomes the protector of eight normal youngsters hiding out in the country. Eventually he sacrifices himself to save them, and is last seen in a position suggesting a crucifixion, a rather heavy bit of symbolism for this particular story.

Nonetheless, Heston dispatches his assailants with bloody efficiency at regular intervals, there's a hairbreadth motorcycle escape and plenty of horrific imagery for the horror fans, adults and youngsters alike. The usual dead-metropolis vistas retain their eerie power and despite a pronounced letdown at the climax, the film stacks up as amusing hokum. Russell Metty contributes slick photography and Ron Grainer's pseudo-religious music is creepily appropriate. The original

novel, which also inspired a somewhat more faithful Vincent Price programmer in 1964, is good enough to deserve remaking until they get it right.

1971. Warner Bros. Panavision, Technicolor. 98 minutes. Charlton Heston, Rosalind Cash, Anthony Zerbe. Produced by Walter Seltzer. Directed by Boris Sagal.

***THE OMEGA MAN** was recently issued as a widescreen anamorphic DVD by Warner Home Video. It was initially rated R and had to forfeit violence, some mild nudity and strong language to win its final PG classification.*

SKYJACKED

Airline hijacking melodrama is competently done formula stuff with topical angle, lively pace, and Charlton Heston. Should attract good response from general audiences. Rated PG.

With **SKYJACKED**, MGM is obviously hoping for another **AIRPORT**—which it isn't. Nonetheless, this airliner-in-peril suspenser is cut from the same commercial cheesecloth as 1970's big hit and boasts many of the same old-fashioned entertainment values, plus a topical plot peg. Charlton Heston heads a recognizable cast. As viewed in unrefined work-print form, the stress of the modest Walter Seltzer production is less on characterization than on straight suspense, mercifully uncluttered almost entirely by pace-slowng

flashbacks. Despite (or perhaps because of) the predictable plotting and breezy disregard for logic, it works all the way as lively, pleasing melodrama, and business should be above-average in the general markets, especially those catering to filmgoers interested in purely escapist entertainment.

Screenwriter Stanley R. Greenberg is credited with this assemblage of updated clichés based on David Harper's novel *AIRBORNE*. For awhile, the identity of the hijacker aboard Global flight 502 remains a mystery—anonymous notes threaten to blow the plane up unless granite-jawed Heston diverts to Anchorage. The fiend could be any one of the assorted first-class passengers—war hero James Brolin, US Senator Walter Pidgeon, son Nicholas Hammond, pretty teenager Susan Dey, jazz cellist Roosevelt Grier, middle-agers Jeanne Crain and Ross Elliott, pregnant Mariette Hartley or a few others. Radar specialist Claude Akins talks Heston down to stormy Anchorage, where the hijacker reveals himself and, armed with grenades and firearms, insists they fly to—where else?—Moscow. The economy passengers are ejected like the unwanted plot complications they are, and the plane takes off. Various personal crises are experienced along the way, as the hijacker holds the cast at bay, belting a few with karate blows. The co-pilot loves stewardess Yvette Mimieux, who really loves old flame Heston. Miss Dey falls for Hammond, Miss Hartley has her baby, Elliott finds courage, etc. Heston braves such dangers as rotten weather, near-collision with a private plane, buzzing by Russian fighters and periodic clouts by the hijacker. By the time they land in Moscow, the villain has flipped out completely, shoots Heston (non-fatally) and is mowed down by Soviet troops.

Though he's capable of better work, John Guillermin (**WALTZ OF THE TOREADORS**, **THE BLUE MAX**) directs the stock situations rather well, playing the cornball suspense angles completely straight. All characters are strictly one-dimensional, but since the print viewed was *sans* credit sequences, more helpful introductory footage may be added. Perry Botkin's score was not yet ready and virtually the only music was a spurt or two of the 2001 "Zarathustra" fanfare, which hopefully will not appear in release prints. The airborne photography is excellent.

1972. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Panavision. Metrocolor. 100 minutes. Charlton Heston, Yvette Mimieux, James Brolin. Produced by Walter Seltzer. Directed by John Guillermin.

SKYJACKED is currently available only as a pan&scanned VHS release from MGM Home Entertainment; it was previously released as a letterboxed laserdisc by the same company.

THE TROUBLE WITH GIRLS

Bland Presley vehicle will please only his devoted fans. Rated G.

Somewhere along the line, a promising if unassuming idea went haywire, and this Elvis Presley vehicle emerges as an unmemorable, lightweight little film with limited appeal for his faithful followers. Elsewhere, lower slotting on dual bills seems inevitable. It is evident that the Lester Welch production had its sights set slightly higher this time out. For awhile, **THE TROUBLE WITH GIRLS** looks like one of Presley's better films, a likeable evocation of small town America circa 1927, when the arrival of a traveling Chautauqua show could arouse real excitement. A sepia-tinted introduction sets the stage, turning to color as the town's ordinary life is transformed by the show's arrival. However, these interesting early sequences give way to thumping melodrama with the ill-conceived introduction of an out-of-place whodunit murder plot: did guilt-ridden Sheree North kill the venal druggist? Writers Arnold and Louise Payser, working from an adaptation by Mauri Gresham of a novel by Day Keene and Dwight V. Babcock, bring in this ploy late in the game, seemingly out of desperation, but it provides little to get excited about. Jumbled in with a few songs and a formula love affair between Presley and Marlyn Mason, the climax has Presley plotting to get the murderer to confess onstage as a gimmick to ballyhoo his show.

Presley has little impact in the bland role of the show's manager, and Edward Andrews works hard at his specialty of the flustered business manager, with even less material than usual. Joyce Van Patten manages some funny moments as a channel swimmer extolling the merits of axle grease over chicken fat as a body rub, while Anissa Jones of TV's *FAMILY AFFAIR* proves a pleasant child actress who brings off some of the film's better scenes. Both Vincent Price and John Carradine are wasted in minor roles of surprisingly limited screen time. A feeling for the times is only fleetingly conveyed in a few summery Ray Bradburyish shots, and when director Peter Tewksbury pumps again for nostalgia at the end, there just isn't any to be had.

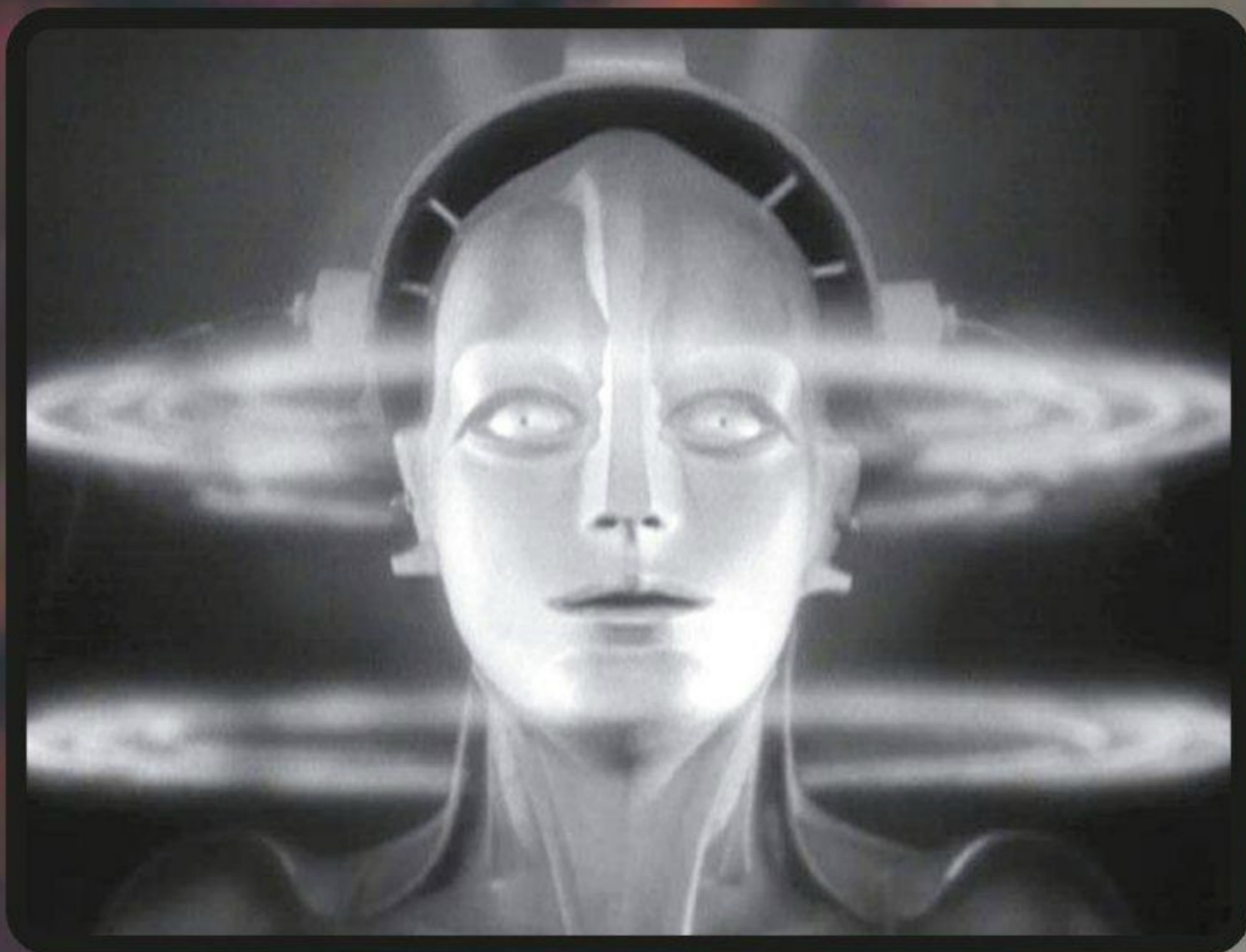
1969. Metro Goldwyn Mayer. Panavision. Technicolor. 97 minutes. Elvis Presley, Marlyn Mason, Nicole Jaffe, Vincent Price. Produced by Lester Welch. Directed by Peter Tewksbury.

THE TROUBLE WITH GIRLS is available on VHS from MGM Home Entertainment.



METRO

LANG



METROPOLIS

1927, Kino on Video, DD-5.1/MA/ST/+,
\$29.95, 115m 42s (excluding restoration
information and credits), DVD-1

METROPOLIS

2001, Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment,
DD-5.1/DTS/MA/16:9/LB/ST/+,
\$27.96, 107m 4s, DVD-1

*Activating Maria and Tima—the artificial
lifeforms of Fritz Lang's and Rintaro's
versions of METROPOLIS.*

K

KINO ON VIDEO has followed an outstanding collection of silent German horror classics [VW 94:14] with what could be their most important release to date: the Friedrich-Wilhelm-Murnau-Stiftung 75th anniversary restoration of Fritz Lang's monumental silent epic, **METROPOLIS**. Coincidentally, Columbia TriStar has unleashed a special edition DVD of Rintaro's Japanese anime feature of the same name, making for one of the more interesting, unintended double features of the year: the science fiction genre's archetypal film followed by its most recent paean.

The history of the original **METROPOLIS** offers a textbook example of the never-ending struggle

OPOLIS

RINTARO



BY BILL COOKE

between art and commerce. With his epic *Die Nibelungen* completed, director Fritz Lang collaborated with his wife, writer Thea von Harbou, on an original screenplay in the spring of 1924. An allegory on the rise and fall of Babylon (as well as modern Germany's comparative ups-and-downs), it told of class warfare in a future megalopolis divided into two social castes: the decadent rich, who live a life of leisure in opulent towers and gardens, and the repressed worker class that toils beneath the ground to keep the city's ravenous machines running. With the project green-lighted by UFA, the most prestigious of the post-war German film studios, Harbou set about adapting the script into a

serialized novel, while Lang traveled to America to buy equipment and learn more about American special effects processes. Awestruck by his first sight of the New York City skyline, Lang described the buildings as "a vertical curtain, opalescent and very light, filling the back of the stage [and] hanging from a sinister sky." These impressions largely informed the design of Lang's imaginary city—an incredible marriage of intricate miniatures, traditional and stop-motion animation, and a variety of elaborate full-scale sets. Budgeted at 1.5 million marks, the film's costs eventually exceeded 6 million, making it the largest-scale German film production up to that time. Film historians would later recognize

METROPOLIS as one of the most important films of the German silent period—not only was it the cornerstone between Expressionism of the 1920s and the New Objectivity movement that lay ahead, but it once-and-for-all turned science fiction into a viable film genre. However, at the time of the film's release, as Kino's excellent documentary points out, "nobody would have betted a penny" on its future significance.

When **METROPOLIS** premiered at the UFA-Palast am Zoo on January 10, 1927, its running time was 153m at a projection speed of 24 fps—roughly one hour longer than the average film of the late '20s. Paramount, which had given UFA money and held the North American distribution rights, had already planned to shorten the film for less patient American audiences and commissioned playwright Channing Pollock to supervise the task. UFA was as concerned as Paramount over the length and yanked the film from its short Berlin run in order to reduce it in the manner of Pollock's American cut. Both versions represented a roughly one-quarter diminishment of the original, with the German version being only slightly longer.

Pollock's unmaking of **METROPOLIS** involved the rewriting of intertitles, the removal of subplots that once added complexity to Harbou's otherwise simplistic fairy tale, and the reordering of scenes to simplify Lang's dramatic technique of cross-cutting between actions in different parts of the city. Perhaps the most drastic alteration involved the relationship between Joh Fredersen (Alfred Abel), the capitalist ruler of Metropolis, and the mad scientist Rotwang (Rudolph Klein-Rogge). In Lang's original cut, Joh parted a curtain inside the scientist's house, revealing the stone head of a woman on a pedestal—a



Two examples of the brilliant scenic illusions of Eugen Schüfftan.



monument to Rotwang's deceased lover, a woman named Hel (after the Nordic goddess of death). A carved epitaph reveals that Hel was actually Fredersen's wife, who died while giving birth to their son Freder (Gustav Frolich). As Enno Patalas writes for the DVD audio commentary, "Rotwang has lost a lover, Joh a wife, Freder a mother—the loss inspires each of them in their actions." Indeed, the set-up was vindicated only moments later when Rotwang introduced his old rival to the

mechanical woman—an obvious replacement for Hel and, later, his engine of destruction.

Pollock found the Hel subplot to be confusing and unsavory (of the robot he wryly remarked, "She must have been an uncomfortable bed-fellow on winter nights"), so he eliminated all references to the "lover-wife-mother" figure and turned Rotwang into Joh's faithful assistant, a crackpot on the verge of creating a new race of machine-men to replace the workers (though it was never explained why

Rotwang's prototypic mechanical "man" had obvious breasts and other female attributes!). Other major cuts included nearly every scene involving the Thin Man (a sinister character who spies on behalf of Joh Frederesen), as well as a lengthy sequence in which Worker 11811 (Erwin Biswanger)—the man that Joh's idealistic son Freder finds lashed to a clock-like machine and trades places with—surrenders to the temptations of Yoshiwara, the city's red light district.

Many more alterations were made—too many to catalogue here—but especially ruinous was Pollock's recutting of the third act. In the original version, the saintly Maria (Brigitte Helm) was mistaken for her evil *döppelgänger* and chased by the incensed workers, whereas in Pollock's revision, scenes were re-arranged and eliminated to make it appear as if only the robotic Maria (also Brigitte Helm) was being pursued. With the mistaken-identity thread missing, the revised sequence was robbed of all tension.

Sadly, we have to assume that Lang's full-length version has been irretrievably lost. For 40 years, all prints were made from the reduced Paramount and UFA dupe negatives until the Staaliches Filmarchiv der DDR attempted the first reconstruction by combining disparate footage from prints around the globe; however, the story was still heavily altered from the original. Then in 1984, composer Giorgio Moroder released a "pop" version of **METROPOLIS**, a controversial attempt to modernize Lang's film through flashy editing and an inappropriate rock soundtrack. Moroder's version introduced the world to some hitherto unknown footage, and these discoveries inspired the most important reconstruction up to that time—the 1987 "Munich Version"—undertaken by film historian Enno

Patalas, whose goal was to not only create the most complete visual record of **METROPOLIS**, but to finally piece together the original, unspoiled narrative. This was no small task, as it involved the study of a censorship certificate that contained a record of the original intertitles, cues on a conductor's copy of the original score sheets, a surviving script draft and a collection of stills. Patalas eventually corrected the intertitles and represented missing scenes with text screens, while black slugs were cut in to indicate lost individual shots.

The present 75th Anniversary reconstruction offers a state-of-the-art digital restoration of the Munich version's picture elements, and the image (much of it coming from an incomplete camera negative) is simply astonishing, often exhibiting the photographic clarity of what one would expect from a modern B&W film. Despite the occasional softness from less pristine positive elements, we can now fully appreciate the luster of Karl Freund's and Gunther Rittau's photography, Lang's delirious imagery (has another film director ever manipulated crowds in such

wildly artistic ways?) and the fine details in the work of art directors Otto Hunte, Erich Kettelhut and Carl Vollbrecht: the 300 (!) stop-motion animated cars and trains that fluidly travel across intersected elevated highways; the blinking neon signs and arcing spotlights that surround the awe-inspiring New Tower of Babel at night (amazingly, a painted animation); and the bizarre equipment and bric-a-brac that decorates Rotwang's expressionistic techno-gothic laboratory.

One would think that such clarity would expose flaws in the trick photography, but quite the contrary. Combinations of miniature models and live-action were mostly achieved on the set through Eugen Schüfftan's mirror trick process—a more time-consuming but purer technique than post-production composite work, and the seams are truly undetectable. In addition, in-camera multiple exposures were incorporated into the effects palette, as in the creation of the robotic Maria, where diabolical fingers of electricity connect the sleeping maiden with her metallic

The recently recovered rooftop garden sequence of Lang's METROPOLIS.





Brigitte Helm as the evil Maria, effortlessly attracting a large and lustful following.

replica whose form becomes embraced by Saturn-like halos of energy. The obvious inspiration for James Whale's celebrated laboratory sequences in **FRANKENSTEIN** (1931) and **THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN** (1935), the effect still packs a wallop today.

Just as impressive is the soundtrack, a stunning large-orchestra performance of the original 1927 score by Gottfried Huppertz presented in Dolby Digital 5.1. Written in the late-romantic style, Huppertz' work anticipates the golden age of Hollywood film music, and as such is more or less a stacking of leitmotifs for all major characters and settings. Among the most memorable themes are the glorious, rising "City" motif, the barbarous rhythms for the Tower of Babel, and the furious ostinati that accompany the churning machines.

The mechanical woman's motif proves the most adaptable to mood shifts—full of wonderment in the creation sequence, but later treated to wild and menacing variations during the robot's masquerade as Maria. Huppertz also incorporates existing music, such as the "La Marseillaise" that underlines the workers' revolt; and the "Dies Irae" which makes for hair-raising accompaniment to Freder's feverish vision of the grim reaper, with cymbal clashes perfectly timed to the spectre's sweeping scythe. The marriage between Lang's visuals and Huppertz' score is such a revelation that we can only hope some enterprising company will one day see fit to restore **NOSFERATU** with its equally fine, though less bombastic, original score by Hans Erdmann.

Kino offers a number of worthwhile special features, but it's best

to start with **THE METROPOLIS CASE**, a 44m documentary by Enno Patalas that covers the German expressionist movement, Lang's rise to prominence (including occasional comments from Lang himself, culled from a 1960s film interview) and the film's troubled history. A segment on the architectural designs reveals some fascinating ideas that never saw fruition, and an absorbing account of the special effects includes a detailed explanation of the Schüfftan mirror process. Additionally, Patalas tells the story of the original narrative, wisely choosing to focus on the Joh/Rotwang/Hel sub-plot to illustrate Pollock's deconstruction and the long road to reconstruction.

With this knowledge in hand, we are well prepared to plunge into the audio commentary, where Patalas admirably compliments his

documentary with additional insights and anecdotes, as well as quotes from Harbou's novel. The main drawback to both the commentary and the documentary is the almost unbearably affected delivery of narrator David Cooke. A short but interesting supplement (8m 48s) is a look into the digital restoration with German-speaking Martin Kroeber, the project's reconstruction supervisor, who demonstrates the hazards of applying too much automatic digital process. Essentially, the program will misinterpret quick movement as unwanted debris and actually remove it! The phenomenon is illustrated in several shots where we get to see objects such as faces and legs disappear and reappear as the film is advanced frame-by-frame. Consequently, the bulk of the restoration was achieved through a wet-scan process, an old-school method that involves a special fluid to fill in scratches.

Nearly every cinematic vision of utopian and dystopian urban sprawl has owed a large debt to Lang's work, including **JUST IMAGINE** (1930), **THINGS TO COME** (1936) and Ridley Scott's **BLADE RUNNER** (1982), which particularly mirrors Thea von Harbou's conceit of class division and Lang's mixture of antiquated and futuristic architectural styles. In the wake of Scott's *magnum opus*, we've seen the rise of a dystopian sub-genre haunted either intentionally or coincidentally by Lang's archetype, including Terry Gilliam's **BRAZIL** (1985), Alex Proyas' **DARK CITY** (1998) and Steven Spielberg's **A.I. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE** (2001) and **MINORITY REPORT** (2002).

Add to this group the ambitious Japanese animated **METROPOLIS** (2001), a collaboration between two giants of the anime movement: director Rintaro (**GALAXY EXPRESS 999**) and writer Katsuhiro Otomo (**AKIRA**). Based

on an early manga that future ASTRO BOY creator Osamu Tezuka serialized between 1947-1949, the story has certain basic similarities to Lang's film: a magnificent future city that stands as the world's model of technological and cultural achievement (nobody understands the results of scientific innovation run amok better than the Japanese), a rotten core in the form of a repressed class of laborers (and robots) banished to the darkness below ground, and a power-mad aristocrat manipulating events from the upper stories of his skyscraping "Tower of Babel."

Into this alternately beautiful and dangerous environment enter Detective Shunsaku Ban and his young tag-along nephew Kenichi who, along with a robot detective dressed like Bogart at the end of **CASABLANCA**, seek a scientist by the name of Dr. Naughton for his human-rights violations. Little do they know that Naughton is holed up in a subterranean factory working for Duke Red, Metropolis' most powerful citizen, who just recently unveiled the world's tallest building, the Ziggurat, and has instructed the old doctor to create the perfect technological being in the image of his deceased daughter, Tima. But just as Naughton is completing his experiment, Duke Red's adopted son Rock—a member of a robot-hating gang of vigilantes known as the Marduks (spelled "Malduks" in the subtitles)—crashes the laboratory and, insane over the notion that his father might love a robot more than him (his fears are warranted), shoots the scientist and sets off a series of explosions. Ban, Kenichi and Pero the Robocop arrive in time for the fireworks and, in the confusion, become separated. Kenichi then discovers Tima among the rubble, naked and glowing unnaturally. Oblivious to human speech and customs, Tima finds a friend

and teacher in the smitten Kenichi; and an innocent love blossoms between the two, even as they run for their lives from an enraged Rock, who gets his kicks from killing unruly robots and won't relent until he's utterly destroyed his father's creation. There is an almost superfluous rebellion of the workers before the main characters finally converge in the throne room of the Ziggurat, where Tima—traumatized by a bullet from Rock and the realization that she is indeed artificial—is forced to face her destiny as ruler...or destroyer...of the human race.

Director Rintaro, who had the pleasure of working on several Tezuka projects including ASTRO BOY, always wanted to adapt **METROPOLIS** into an anime and even proposed it to his boss; however, the "God of Manga"—perhaps feeling that such an early work lacked finesse—would never agree to it. It wasn't until years after Tezuka's death in 1989 and a meeting with Otomo that Rintaro started to realize his dream project. The finished film is anime's most ambitious marriage between old and new techniques; traditional cel animation was utilized for the characters and foregrounds, while the detailed cityscapes and complex background machinery were achieved in the digital realm. It's rewarding to be aware of Rintaro's approach before sitting down to view the film, because only then can one appreciate his juxtaposition of the two media (the warmth and imperfection of analog against the cold perfection of computer graphics) as wry commentary on one of the story's major themes: the co-existence of humanity and technology.

Rintaro's **METROPOLIS** is an interesting study in contrasts.

*Comparisons of imagery from the
Lang and Rintaro versions of
METROPOLIS.*







Pero The Robocop, Detective Ban and his nephew Kenichi—traditional anime character types amid the photo-realistic marvels of Rintaro's METROPOLIS.

While the background environments are astonishingly detailed—at times achieving a nearly photo-realistic quality—the characters are in the old-fashioned manga style and about as unrealistic and stylized as cartoon characters can get. Though the story is certainly peppered with the expected cutesy elements of an animated film (there's an adorable trash-can robot named Fifi), it is serious, layered, philosophical and dramatic—not the kind of entertainment one expects from characters who look like they hail from a Snuffy Smith comic strip. Additionally, the music score—a monothematic work built upon a cheerful Dixieland jazz tune—is atypical of the genre, but winds up working surprisingly well, setting a festive pulse to the visuals and helping to reinforce the mixture of architectural styles and cultures on display. The inevitable destruction of the Ziggurat becomes poetic rather than merely chaotic when it's set to Ray Charles' rendition of "I Can't Stop Loving You," which brings to mind another musically audacious apocalyptic

finale from a certain Stanley Kubrick film.

The parallels to Lang's film are numerous: Dr. Naughton is obviously modeled after Rotwang, while Duke Red is clearly Joh Fredersen; the Tower of Babel is an openly stated parable in both films, and shot selection during Tima's activation echoes the awakening of the robotic Maria—but Rintaro references **BLADE RUNNER** just as many times, including the dimly "lit" police station, the rows of open-air shops and noodle bars on the workers' level, and the slow-motion gunning down of a fleeing robot. In another *hommage*, the ghost of Tim Burton's **BATMAN RETURNS** (1992) haunts a beautiful wintertime segment with snow flakes falling against grey monolithic towers. The character of Tima has only tenuous ties to the saintly Maria and her artificial alter-ego, seeming to be modeled more after Leeloo from Luc Besson's Moebius-inspired **THE FIFTH ELEMENT** (1997)—another blank-slate innocent with godly powers, taught and "protected" by a love struck hero. But

to be fair, Besson was likely influenced by anime in the first place, which often contains these Messianic characters and apocalyptic endings.

A Japanese "Memorial Box" reportedly boasts the definitive transfer and a plethora of print supplements, but more casual stateside fans should be satisfied with Columbia TriStar's 2-disc special edition. The anamorphic video rendering (letterboxed to a ratio of approximately 1.71:1) features nice contrasts and superb color; and there's enough resolution for the naked eye to distinguish the textural differences between the razor-sharp computer graphics and the softer lines of the animation cels. Compression is occasionally noticeable during character movement, and for that we can probably blame the disc's excessive audio options: two Dolby-Digital 5.1 tracks (Japanese and English), a Japanese DTS track, and 2-channel Dolby Surround in French. Either Japanese audio option is the way to go, as the voice actors are far more natural and emotive than those



The fiery demises of the Maria robot and Tima.



found in the carelessly produced English dub. A comparison of the English subtitles with the English language track exposes a subtle softening of the film for Western children. Some rough expletives from the original are altered to more benign curses in the English dub, and Tima's third-act assault on mankind changes from "biological warfare" to "irradiation." Purists might be disappointed by the English-only end titles, but without them, we wouldn't be privy to the fact that Rintaro played bass clarinet in the score's jazz ensemble!

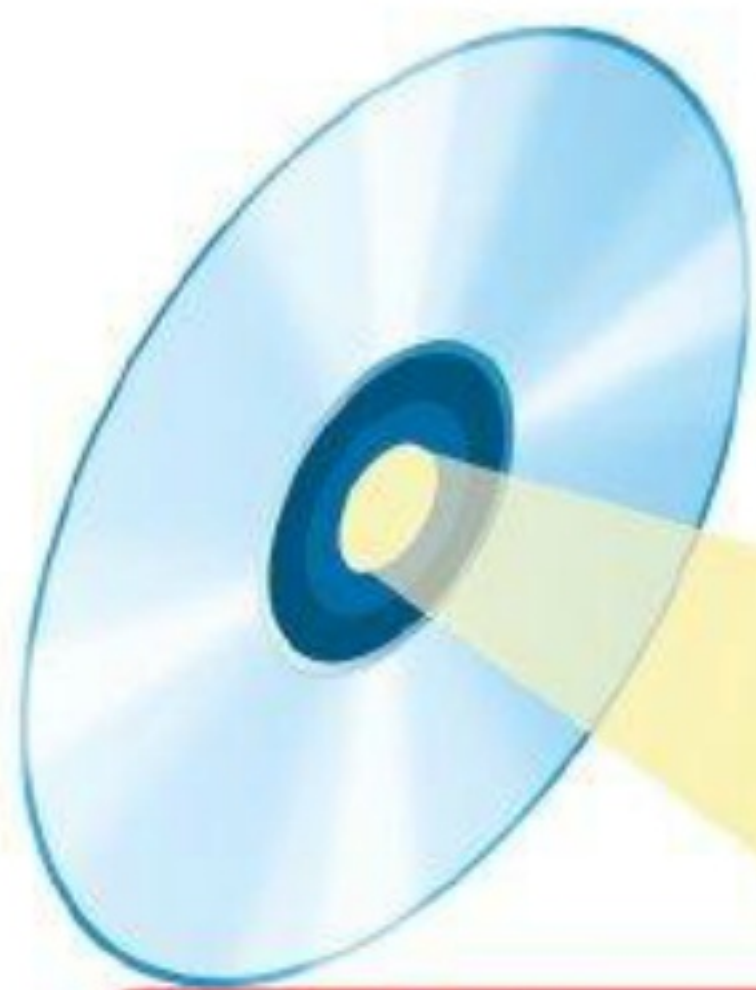
Special features have been consigned to a 3-inch "pocket disc," the most substantial being a dovetailing of two roughly 17m Japanese video specials into one 33m subtitled documentary on the making of the film. After a longish introductory montage ("Five years in the making! Total number of animation cells—150,000! A production budget of \$15 million!"), Rintaro and Otomo reminisce about the film's long road to completion, the state of the art of anime (says Otomo: "Japanese live-action films are way behind, however in animation I think that we are

ahead of America in some ways"), the incorporation of the character Rock into **METROPOLIS** in order to add more depth to the storyline (he hailed from another Tezuka manga: "Shonen Tantei Rock Home" or "Boy Detective Rock Home," published in 1949), and their thoughts on how the "God of Manga" would have received their film. "He would have hated it," Otomo offers with a nervous laugh, after which Rintaro adds: "I hope he doesn't haunt me as a ghost!" In addition, composer Toshiyuki Honda (a saxophonist) admits "it brings tears to my eyes," and discusses the challenge of coming up with the perfect, flexible melody. Some of the animators joke about Rintaro always scribbling on their computers with black markers; and we get to see the voice talent at work in front of video monitors. (In Japan, animation comes before the soundtrack, whereas in America, voices are almost always pre-recorded as a guide for the animators.)

Of course, it's doubtful that anyone could watch the final act of the anime **METROPOLIS** and not think of the events of September 11. In a separate 8m interview segment, Otomo flirts with indignity when he blurts out, "It was good to see the perfect city getting destroyed in the end." Suddenly realizing the ramifications of his words, he quickly adds: "Am I in trouble for saying that?" The extras are rounded out by a photo gallery, two shots broken down into their raw material ("Wheel Room" and "City View"), filmographies, and a text history.

Oddly, despite the film's allegiance to Lang's archetypal work (more so than the original manga), there isn't a single mention of the 1927 **METROPOLIS** in the documentary, the filmmakers' interviews or *any* of the disc's supplemental material.





DVD SPOTLIGHT



A virulent plague wastes no time getting started as a lab chimp infects a technician.

28 DAYS LATER...

Reviewed by Kim Newman

If *anything* could be more surprising than the fact that Danny Boyle (best known as director of **TRAINSPOTTING**) and novelist-screenwriter Alex Garland (source author for Boyle's disappointing **THE BEACH**) should collaborate on a low-budget, shot-on-DV science fiction horror picture, it would be the film turning out as the best British movie in its genre since **DEATH LINE** [US: **RAW MEAT**, 1973]. A recent, post-millennial revival in British-based horror movie-making has turned out fine films (**THE BUNKER**, **DOG SOLDIERS**, **MY LITTLE EYE**) and some dross (**NINE LIVES**, **LONG TIME DEAD**) but **28 DAYS LATER...** is distinguished by its mix of genre savvy—when it quotes **DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS** or **DAY OF THE DEAD**, it's with respect not out of laziness—and edgy, on-the-streets, Dogme-like verisimilitude.

In a shocking prologue, animal rights activists break into a research facility, and release a chimp infected with a virulent genetically-engineered plague that causes infectees to become bundles of psychopathic rage. 28 days later, as a caption/

title card reads, comatose Irish cycle messenger Jim (Cillian Murphy) wakes after a minor accident in an abandoned London hospital and discovers the city empty but for piles of corpses, vicious bands of mindless infected whose bite or bloodspray spreads the disease and a few toughened survivors. Here, the film draws on genre precursors and images from real-life disasters and conflicts: a wall in Piccadilly Circus covered in notes and photocopied posters asking after disappeared loved ones; survivors hopped up on an

28 DAYS LATER...

2002, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment,
DD-5.1 & 2.0/16:9/LB/ST/+, \$27.90,
112m 55s, DVD-1

2002, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment,
DD-5.1 & 2.0/16:9/LB/ST/+, £17.99,
108m 27s (= 113m 4s NTSC), DVD-2 (PAL)

all-sugar diet after getting by on scavenged sweets, soft drinks and chocolates for weeks. After hearing a last radio broadcast, Jim sets out with survivalist Selina (Naomie Harris), taxi driver Frank (**LAKE PLACID**'s Brendan Gleeson) and his teenage daughter (Megan Burns) to travel North, eventually finding a refuge run by army officer Henry (Christopher Eccleston) in a requisitioned country house which adds an air of gothic menace (heightened by images like blood-red dresses) to the post-apocalypse wasteland. There, Jim and Selina discover that merely surviving isn't enough to make it worth carrying on.

The film explicitly evokes George A. Romero as tense survivors try to cope with the malicious walking dead and the gun-toting shreds of devastated authority, but isn't content with mere pastiche and has a sense that this sub-genre's specifically British roots were laid down at least as long ago as H.G. Wells. Floating in the mind of **28 DAYS LATER...** are lasting cultural artifacts passed around or hotly discussed in British school playgrounds for decades, the novels of John Wyndham (the waking-up-in-a-deserted-hospital), John Christopher (source author for Cornel Wilde's **NO BLADE OF GRASS**, which is echoed several times here) and James Herbert (one scene hinges on a flood of rats) or the science shock TV series **DOOM WATCH** (don't trust the labcoats!) and **SURVIVORS** (if everyone's dead, what's the point in surviving?). Depopulated London, stunningly

achieved by snatched digi-cam shots of empty streets and abandoned landmarks, is a resonant location, striking chords with anyone who has ever wondered what the place would be like without people and embedded deep in the psyche by everything from Wells' **WAR OF THE WORLDS** to **DALEKS' INVASION EARTH 2150 AD**. An American film on this theme might start with the survivors gathering guns and using them as if they'd been fighting wars all their lives; here, even the toughest character, hardboiled pharmacist Selina, isn't that skilled at fending off zombies. Survivalism is better represented by a tower block rooftop covered with a pathetic array of bright plastic buckets, basins and bins to catch rain that hasn't fallen, proving that even after the apocalypse the weather will still be a national obsession and setting up an unforgettable sudden thunderstorm to accompany the fast, gut-punch brutal third act.

The power of the film is not that it hasn't been done before but that it hasn't been done recently. Since the early 1970s, British movies have narrowed focus to the problems of small groups of people, gnawing over microcosm genres like the gangster heist or romantic comedy. Here, we look at a bigger picture, intensifying the situation for a typically Boyle-like knot of antagonistic, uncomfortable characters. Headlines about Tony Blair and talk about **THE SIMPSONS** insist that this future is just a step away, but forget the rave scene that might theoretically embrace such anarchy—

Jim (Cillian Murphy) discovers relics of hundreds of people desperately seeking loved ones in an absolutely deserted Piccadilly Circus.



here, the whole of Manchester is on fire and the only use for mood-altering drugs is to numb the mind to literally unbearable realities. **28 DAYS LATER...** may be a stylistic break with previous Boyle movies, but has a similar structure (the first hour presents a collection of anecdotes and observations, setting up a concentrated narrative that makes the second half of the film seem almost like a sequel to the first) and even falls back on the essay topics of **THE BEACH**, as alternative society turns out to be flawed by reliance on brutality and vulnerable to sudden shark/zombie attacks.

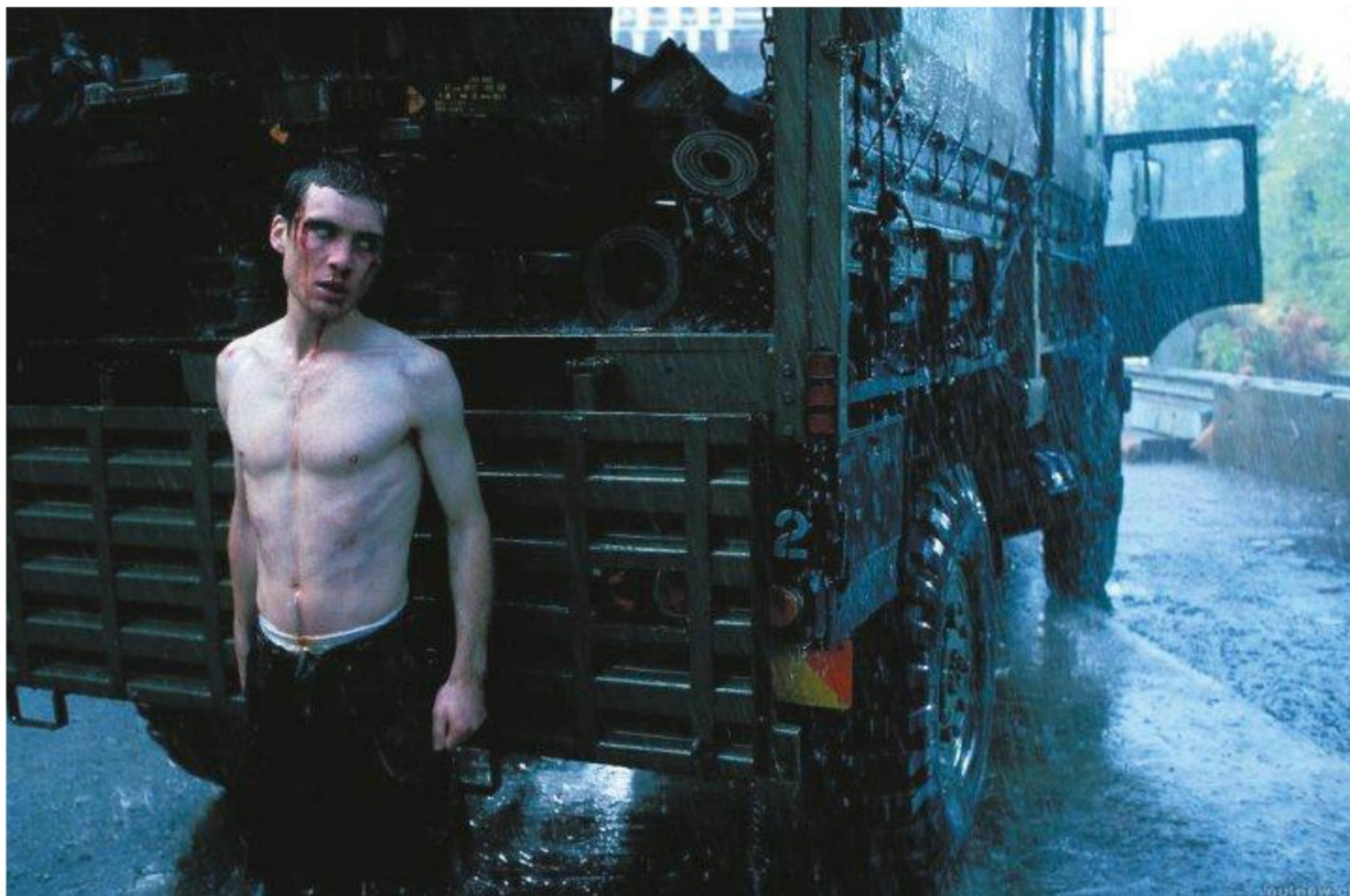
Shot with camcorder veracity by Dogme-specialist Anthony Dod Mead, the film has space for lyricism as the survivors briefly make it as happy campers in green, damp countryside. Once outside London, the film subtly establishes the enduring features of England—a ruined abbey, a 15th century cottage, the stately home—that persist even after civilization has fallen. Boyle also pulls daring tricks with sped-up motion and blobby bloodbursts to make the horror sequences genuinely jarring in a manner that marks a break with the more traditional effectsiness of, say, **DOG SOLDIERS**. There is also room for the subtle, character-based chill: the scariest line is Eccleston's whispered "slow down," a pregnant phrase overheard just as we realize how bad things really are. Any film as rough-edged as this flirts with seeming amateurish (on some level, it's a supercharged take on video-shot zombie-gore



Jim and Selina (Naomie Harris) take a chance by ascending to the only lighted apartment in a deserted highrise.

Marvin Campbell scares the bejeebers out of audiences in the latest film from TRAINSPOTTING's Danny Boyle.





*After fighting hoardes of infected people for the right to survive, Jim must ask himself, "What's left to survive **for**?"*

quickies like **VIOLENT SHIT** or **SHATTER DEAD**), and the powerful broad strokes performances recall an observation made of **ON THE BEACH** that it's impossible to judge the acting since what constitutes appropriate behavior in this situation is anybody's guess. The transfer reproduces perfectly the theater look of the film, though it should be remembered that using DV means trading away a certain level of DVD-friendly perfection to gain a raw authenticity. In case you misjudge this for simple messiness, note the range of the 5.1 soundtrack, which delivers one of the most eerily unsettling sound mixes in recent cinema and some dynamic, noisy scare moments.

Fox's generously appointed disc first materialized in the UK as a Region 2 DVD, which is evidently more complete than the domestic cut, which runs 9s shorter and carries an R rating. (We noticed what looked like a cut as an infected character was about to be machine-gunned in the face at point blank range.) Loading the disc triggers Fox trailers that can be sped-through but not skipped—including one for **RESIDENT EVIL**, which is ironic given Garland's statement that he's happy to own up to ripping off **DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS** or **DAWN OF THE DEAD** but is irritated

to be accused of imitating Paul Anderson's shoddy, Romero-derived video game adaptation. Boyle and Garland provide a detailed commentary track, full of anecdotal detail, and carry over to deleted scenes and alternate endings. Boyle even follows the recent trend of talking through galleries of stills and on-set photographs—honestly admitting that his favorite still is a film image the DV camera wasn't sharp enough to capture for inclusion in the film. The deleted scenes include an elaborate but rejected camera move that shows what the film looked like before it was digitally-processed to remove things like moving cars and living people from the edges of the frame and a comic bit with the characters imitating a stereotypical London cab driver which Garland professes to hate but struck me as rather charming. The two alternate endings are A) a full assembly of a much more downbeat finish that still resembles the way the film does end, and B) a storyboard with Boyle and Garland reading the script to illustrate a radical but rejected direction with comments zeroing in on plot credibility problems they couldn't think of a way to resolve or they'd taken that direction. Also: **PURE RAGE** (a making-of featurette) and a Jacknife Lee music video.



A full-page background image featuring the superhero Daredevil. He is wearing his iconic red suit and mask, which has a white stripe down the center. He is in a crouched, ready position, looking off to the side. The background is a dramatic scene of fire and smoke, with many bright, out-of-focus light points that look like sparks or distant lights. The overall color palette is dominated by reds, oranges, and yellows from the fire.

DVDs

DAREDEVIL

2003, 20TH Century Fox Home Entertainment, DD-5.1/DTS/MA/16:9/LB/ST/CC/+, \$29.98, 103m 29s, DVD-1

By Kim Newman

Blind heroes whose enhanced other senses make them more competent than sighted enemies have been around since at least Ernest Bramah's Victorian sleuth Max Carados. On television, James Franciscus (who looked rather like a comic book secret identity) fought crime as *LONGSTREET*, while a long-running Japanese film series followed the martial artistry of blind *masseur*-swordsman Zatoichi.

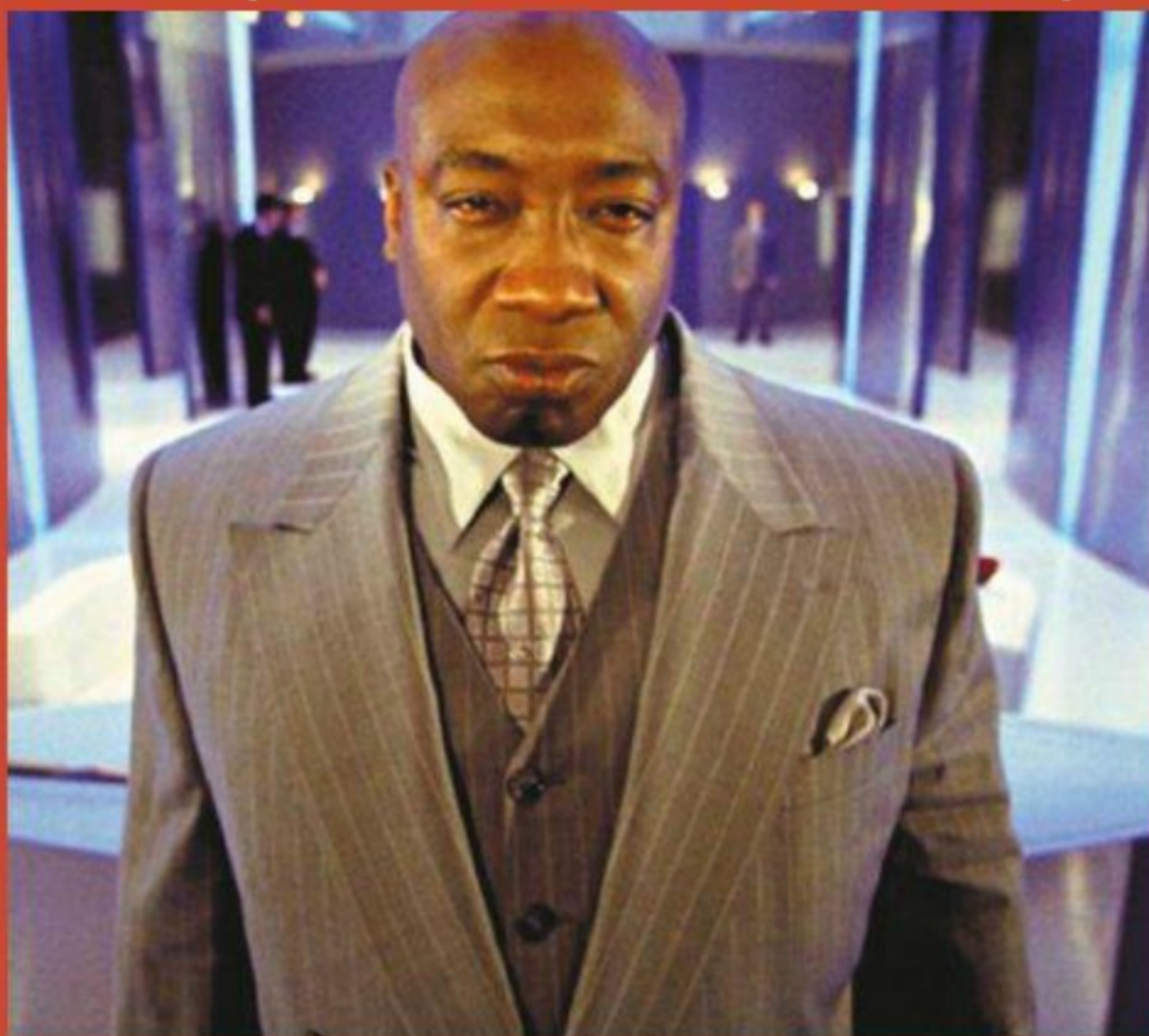
Stan Lee's addition to the roster was Daredevil, introduced in 1962 in his own title, initially drawn by Bill Everett, whose yellow uniform design was swiftly traded in for a snappier red look (a blind hero couldn't be blamed for this initial mistake). An accident with radioactive material (a common source of super-powers in the early '60s) left young Matt Murdock blind but gifted with compensatory super-senses. Further traumatized by the murder of his washed-up boxer father, he lives a double life as crusading lawyer by day and masked vigilante by night. Despite an interesting and varied love life and runs by critically-acclaimed creators from Gene Colan to Frank Miller, Jr., DD never made the front rank of Marvel characters—though (unlike the now-superstar *X-MEN*) his book was never canceled. Played by Rex Smith in a black ninja outfit that little resembled any of the comics' devil suits, Daredevil managed a sole live-action media appearance as support hero in the 1989 TV movie, **THE TRIAL**

OF THE INCREDIBLE HULK. After decades of misfires from **HOWARD THE DUCK** through 21st Century's stab at **CAPTAIN AMERICA** to the unreleased Roger Corman **FANTASTIC FOUR**, Marvel's characters are currently clicking in movies, and so this big-screen **DAREDEVIL** has to establish itself beside movie re-imaginings like **BLADE**, **X-MEN** and **SPIDER-MAN**.

Even more than Sam Raimi's **SPIDER-MAN**, this is a movie made by an enthusiast (writer-director Mark Steven Johnson) who grew up with the material and was motivated to wrestle it into movie shape. On this evidence, it's possible that an outsider who needs to get up to speed on the franchise, like Bryan Singer on the *X-MEN* films, is a cannier bet. Though it hits all the fan-pleasing basics, reinvents the characters and premise in intriguingly cinematic ways and offers mainly fine casting, there's something slightly flat

about the movie. It tries hard to carve out its own grittier, *noirish* territory in the superhero genre but keeps feeling (as, to be fair, did the first issues of the comic) like a knock-off of heroes and gimmicks that have worked recently. The film opens with credits in accurate braille on New York skyscrapers and an image (Daredevil, literally a bleeding heart liberal, clinging to a cross atop a church) lifted from a recent Kevin Smith/Joe Quesada comic, then flashes back to deliver a *précis* of the origin story from way back in #1 (revisited many times since, notably in the Frank Miller/John Romita, Jr. miniseries *THE MAN WITHOUT FEAR*). Johnson realizes how much Lee borrowed from boxing *noir* movies like **BODY AND SOUL** and **THE SET-UP** and delivers a potent pastiche of the style as Jack "the Devil" Murdock (David Keith) refuses to throw a fight because his blind son is in the audience. In a wrinkle

Michael Clarke Duncan as The Kingpin—no longer a deceptively fat-looking mass of muscle, but a common polished thug.



◀ Ben Affleck as Marvel's Man Without Fear—**DAREDEVIL**.



Daredevil tangles with Elektra (Jennifer Garner) in an interesting fusion of the comic's Bill Everett and Frank Miller periods.

modelled on the replacement of Joe Chill by the Joker in Tim Burton's **BATMAN**, the fight-fixer who has Jack's father killed employs a thug who will grow up to be Matt's greatest nemesis and has a trademark (a rose dropped on his victims) that later gives away this element of the backstory.

In more recent flashbacks, Matt (Ben Affleck) is well-established in both his careers and we get essentially an adaptation of Miller's run as writer-artist on the title, which co-opted Spider-Man villain Wilson Fisk, aka the Kingpin, as DD's arch-enemy. The comic book Fisk (John Rhys-Davies in **TRIAL OF THE INCREDIBLE HULK**) was a big white bald man, but Michael Clarke Duncan is an interesting bit of casting, though it's an innate jolly giant quality rather than blackness that makes him visually spot on but somehow just

not nasty enough for the role. Matt falls in love with Elektra (Jennifer Garner), daughter of a billionaire trying to disentangle his business from the Kingpin's, and is torn up when Elektra transforms into a leather-clad avenger after the Kingpin has imported Irish hit-man Bullseye (Colin Farrell)—a dexterous bastard who can convert anything into a deadly throwing weapon—to murder Elektra's father. In a surprisingly close adaptation of a seminal Miller issue (**DAREDEVIL #181**), Bullseye cuts Elektra's throat with a flicked playing card and skewers her with her own sai, whereupon the flashbacks run out and the film hurries through a series of resolutions that keep open the options on who's dead, alive, in power, in jail, happy or traumatized for expected sequels and spin-offs. Among the many signs of indecision evident is the

fact that this is a rare movie that actually makes extensive use of the specially-commissioned but mediocre rock and pop songs usually shunted off onto the "inspired by" soundtrack album.

Some of the plot problems (the number of people running around who know the hero's secret identity) are carried over from the comics, but others are newly minted. In the commentary track, Johnson and producer Gary Foster talk about a battle with the front office over an early scene in which Daredevil lets a despicable rapist (Paul Ben-Victor) be cut in half by a subway train. In theory, this establishes a tougher, more dangerous hero (they admit the comic book guy would have rescued the villain), but in practice it leaves us with someone who essentially kills a thug who beat up a client, but leaves alive the murderers of his

girlfriend and his father. Fallon (an uncredited Mark Margolis), aka the Fixer in the comics—who ordered the death of Murdock Senior—isn't even brought to justice. The elements that work are mostly the re-envisioning of the hero himself. The night-time tumbling across chasms between skyscrapers is a blend of elements from the BATMAN and SPIDER-MAN movies, but a separate identity is carved for Daredevil in scenes that show Affleck's Murdock sleeping in an isolation tank to damp his senses, dosing himself with pain-killers after a night of brawling, using his handicap to meet cute with chicks, and bantering with his sidekick/law partner Foggy Nelson (Jon Favreau). If neither Clarke's Kingpin nor Garner's Elektra match the formidable, monstrous comics characters, then Bullseye—initially an opponent of NICK FURY—AGENT OF S.H.I.E.L.D., though the character notes seem to have forgotten that—is wonderfully incarnated by Colin Farrell, who uses his natural accent for a change as he snarls resentment (“You made me miss... I *never* miss!”) and envy (“I want a bloody costume!”).

Competing with the **SPIDER-MAN** and **X-MEN 1.5** DVD releases, Fox have put a lot into **DAREDEVIL**'s 2-disc special edition. The widescreen transfer is excellent, though digital color-correction gives the dark-looking movie an unreal clarity that takes some getting used to. You can tell just how much the process has been used by accessing the hidden feature outtake reel on Disc Two, which shows that Affleck had his hair dyed red to match the comic book character, though it's so darkened in the color mix as to be imperceptible. Disc One offers the solid Johnson/Foster track, a text commentary that adds useful

snippets (in comics, Murdock has let 55 people in on his secret), the always-irritating “enhanced viewing mode” which requires the viewer to click on a highlight to get narrated effects elements (a lot of effort for minimal reward) and a comic book chronology on DVD-ROM. Besides room-filling 5.1 mixes that pretty much reproduce Daredevil's super-hearing, alternate dialogue tracks are offered in Spanish and French. An especially thoughtful option is that, in addition to being closed-captioned for the hard of hearing, the film has an audio-narration which fills in the action for the visually impaired.

Disc Two has almost more extras than it needs, especially as the HBO “First Look” special and a featurette on the Kingpin are offcuts from the hour-long, nicely-detailed “Beyond Hell's Kitchen” making-of (which also has “branching” sidetracks that would have made more sense cut into the main body of the piece). Another hour-long documentary consists of interviews with many of the writers and artists who have worked on the character over the years, from co-creator Stan Lee to the current team of Brian Michael Bendis and David Mack (most of the creatives get name-checked in the movie, typically as fighters pitted against Jack Murdock). Also: Garner's screen test, trailers, music videos, a stills gallery, multi-angles and dailies, and a featurette on “blind advisor” Tom Sullivan. Though the hidden gag reel uses some bits of Favreau improv mentioned in the commentary, other deleted scenes—including more of Ellen Pompeo as Nelson & Murdock's secretary Karen Page—aren't in the package: I, for one, could have lived without the rock videos to make room for these.

FIND A PLACE TO DIE

Joe! Cercati un posto per morire

“Joe! Look for a Place to Die!”
1968, VCI Entertainment, DD-2.0/LB/+, \$14.95, 87m 42s, DVD-0

ANY GUN CAN PLAY

Vado... l'ammazzo e torno

aka **GO KILL AND COME BACK**
1968, VCI Entertainment, DD-2.0/LB/+, \$14.95, 97m 17s, DVD-0

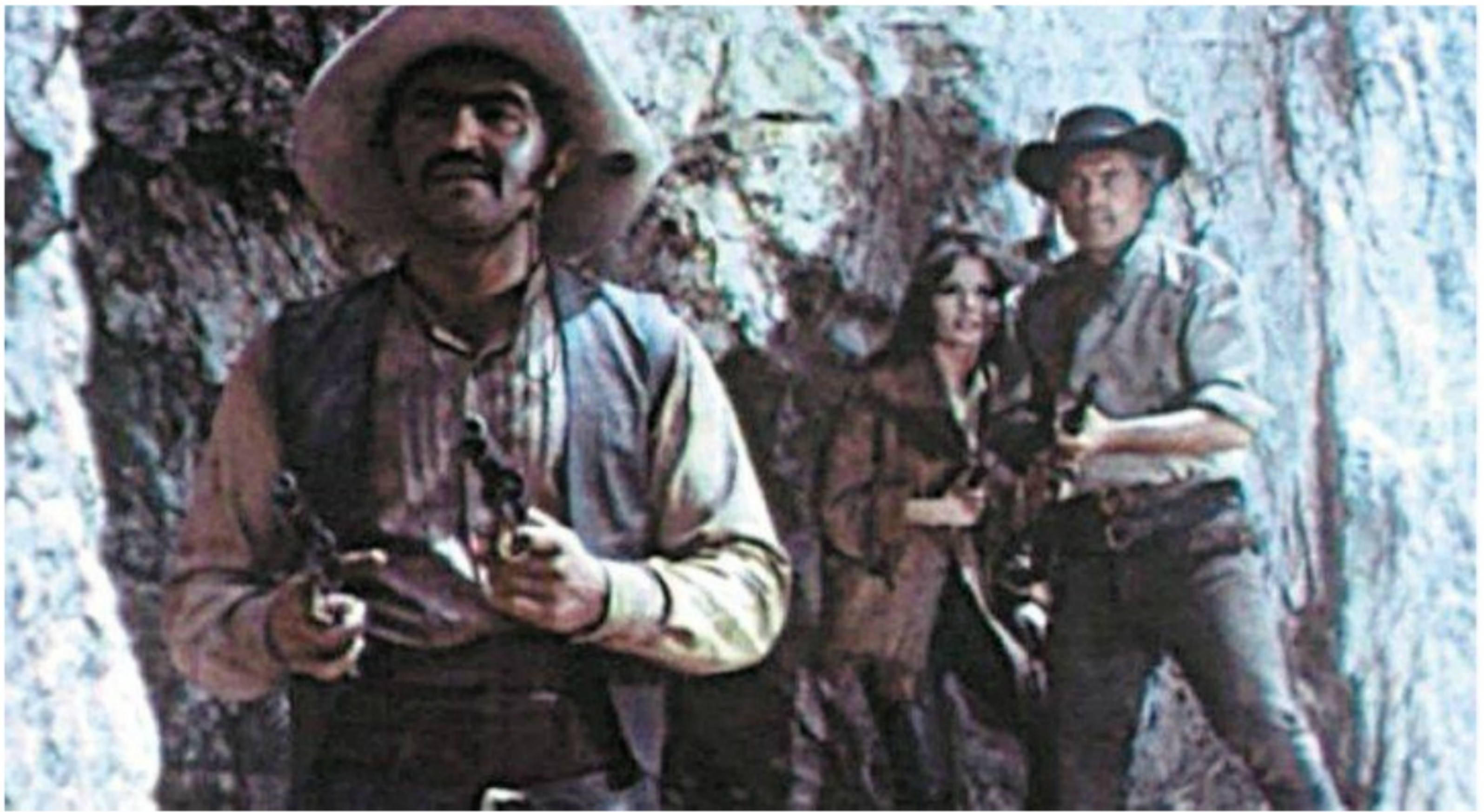
TODAY WE KILL... TOMORROW WE DIE!

Oggi a me... domani a te!

“Today It's Me... Tomorrow It's You!”
1968, VCI Entertainment, DD-2.0/LB/+, \$14.95, 94m 17s, DVD-1
By Richard Harland Smith

However derivative, this trio of Spaghetti Westerns illustrate “the 3 R's” of the Euroater: redemption, reclamation and revenge. Early works from Italian action artisans Giuliano Carnimeo (**THE CASE OF THE BLOODY IRIS**), Romolo Guerrieri (**DETECTIVE BELLI**), Enzo Castellari (**KEOMA**), Tito Carpi (**COLD EYES OF FEAR**), Tonino Cervi (**THE EXQUISITE CADAVER**) and future director Dario Argento, these films show where the genre was pointed, post-Leone.

Former movie Messiah and STAR TREK refusnik Jeffrey Hunter stars in Giuliano Carnimeo's **FIND A PLACE TO DIE** as Joe Collins, an ex-cavalry officer reduced to running guns south of the border. Court-martialed and wanted for murder by the Texas Rangers, Joe is drowning his sorrows in the *cantina* of Nido de Águilas when approached by Lisa Martin (Pascale Petit), the desperate wife of a prospector (Piero Lulli, billed as “Peter Lull”) trapped by an avalanche high in the Sierras. For \$2,000 in gold, Joe agrees to rescue Lisa's husband from both the landslide and the army



Crack shot Reza Fazelli assists Pascale Petit and Jeffrey Hunter's mission in *FIND A PLACE TO DIE*.

of bandit chieftain Chato ("Their idea of fun is a word called torture"). Before Joe and his crew of mercenaries—whose number includes crack shot Paco (Reza Fazeli), the hulking Fernando (Nello Pazzafini, billed as "Ted Carter") and the secretive Gomez (Giovanni Pallavicino, billed as "Gordon York")—have crossed the desert, they are joined by gun-toting cleric Reverend Riley (Aldolfo Lastretti, aka "Peter Lastrett"). Distrustful of his hirelings (particularly Riley, whom he recognizes from his stretch in federal prison), Joe successfully leads his crew to the mine—where they find Lisa's husband dead and the gold missing. Deducing that Chato has taken the booty back to Nido de Águilas, the motley crew decides to stick together and grab the gold from "the meanest bunch in the territory."

By the time **FIND A PLACE TO DIE** was released in the US, Jeffrey Hunter was long dead from a stroke that resulted from an on-set accident during the shooting of *¡Viva America!* (1969), his last film. Born Henry

Herman McKinnies, Jr. in 1926, Hunter had by the mid-'60s seen his Hollywood stock dip considerably; after the failure of his *TEMPLE HOUSTON* TV series, the twice-divorced 42 year-old actor (who wed again before his death in May 1969) turned down the lead on *STAR TREK* to work abroad in such far flung projects as José María Elorrieta's **WITCH WITHOUT A BROOM** [*Una bruja sin escoba*, 1968], Franz Antel's **SEXY SUSAN SINS AGAIN** [*Frau Wirtin hat auch einen Grafen*, 1968] and Federico Curiel's **SUPERCOLT 38** (1969), for which he was brought down to Mexico to replace Nick Adams (who died of a prescription drug overdose in February 1968). Hunter had just finished **THE CHRISTMAS KID** [*Joe Navidad*, 1968] in Spain for director Sidney Pink when he signed on for this Hugo Fregonese production, an authorized remake of Henry Hathaway's **GARDEN OF EVIL** (1954), signed by director Giuliano Carnimeo as "Anthony Ascott." Paunchy and gray, Hunter looks decades past his

lanky prime in John Ford's **THE SEARCHERS** (1955) and Nicholas Ray's **KING OF KINGS** (1961), but nonetheless radiates star power as the disillusioned Yankee (first seen singing along to a mournful *cancion* like a film *noir* chump-in-the-making), whose blazing blue eyes belie the belief that "Joe Collins hasn't got any principles."

FIND A PLACE TO DIE does little to advance the genre but remains consistently entertaining due to Carnimeo's tart direction (Carnimeo and writer Tito Carpi would later inaugurate the "Sartana" Westerns, starring the likes of Gianni Garko and George Hilton) and an attractive international cast. French actress Pascale Petit is appropriately gorgeous as the desperate Linda Martin, capable of dispensing equal amounts of ammo and exposition ("The clever young geologist had to show off. You found a mine everybody said was all worked out. You proved there still was gold..."); Petit later turned up with co-star Daniela Giordano (a former Miss Italy cast

here as a guitar slinging *puta*) in Mario Bava's **FOUR TIMES THAT NIGHT** [*Quante volte... quella notte*, 1972] and was reteamed with both Giordano and Jeffrey Hunter in the Austrian farce **SEXY SUSAN SINS AGAIN**. Iranian actor Reza Fazeli makes a passable Mexican as the oafish Pedro while Nello Pazzafini (**MAD DOG**) and Adolfo Lastretti (a disreputable parson again in Lucio Fulci's **FOUR OF THE APOCALYPSE**) make for a fine pair of finks. The screenplay's language (Collins refers to his gang as "bastards" and Pedro is openly regarded as a "pimp") and some discreet nudity (during one artfully shot scene of consensual sex and later during an attempted rape) kept **FIND A PLACE TO DIE** from being seen in America until 1971.

Of the three VCI discs in this series, **FIND A PLACE TO DIE** is perhaps the poorest-looking, with washed-out colors and weak contrasts in night (or day-for-night) scenes. The image also bears a fair amount of grain, but these deficits are evened out somewhat by the 1.85:1 framing and the lack of print damage. Cinematographer Riccardo Pallottini (who shot many a film for Antonio Margheriti) condescends to too many Dutch angles to freshen the over-familiar material but otherwise makes good use of the widescreen aperture. The 2.0 Dolby sound is acceptable and hiss-free. Jeffrey Hunter supplies his own voice and Milanese songstress Jula de Palma (whose use of erotically charged lyrics scandalized the 1959 San Remo Festival) supplies the title song; par for the Euro course, the foley work makes each landed punch sound like someone slamming the bonnet of a Peugeot. This all-region DVD of **FIND A PLACE TO DIE** has been given 12 chapters and extras consist of trailers for two RKO Ronald Reagan

Westerns available from VCI, **CATTLE QUEEN OF MONTANA** (2m 7s) and **TENESSEE'S PARTNER** (2m 16s). Keepcase packaging employs attractive original poster art but VCI's copy perpetuates some misinformation, at least in regard to the American dub; while Joe is identified in this version only as ex-cavalry and Lisa is shown to be Peter Carter's wife, VCI's copy cites Collins as a former Confederate officer and Lisa as Martin's sister—perhaps this was how the characters were drawn in the Italian version.

The titular imperative of Enzo Castellari's **Vado... l'ammazzo e torno** was swiped from a line of dialogue in Sergio Leone's **THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY** [*Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo*, 1968], in which Eli Wallach's lawless Tuco Benedicto Pacifico Juan Maria Ramirez exhorts his cronies to "Go kill and come back." In the film's pre-credit sequence (underscored by a persuasive bit of cod-Morricone, courtesy of Francesco De Masi), Castellari stages a patently Leonesque stand-off in the middle of a dusty street between three gunmen (who bear a superficial likeness to Clint Eastwood, Lee Van Cleef and **DJANGO**'s Franco Nero) and a grinning bounty hunter (George Hilton) known only as "The Stranger" (Eastwood's moniker in the shooting scripts of his first two films for Leone). Further on, Castellari cadges an occasional setpiece from Leone (two voyeurs catching sight of one another through the lenses of their respective telescopes, three gunfighters squaring off over buried loot); a particular line of dialogue ("You talk too much... if you're going to shoot a man, go ahead and shoot him") spoken by *bandido* Monetero (Gilbert Roland) sounds suspiciously like Tuco's now famous "If you want to shoot, shoot... don't talk."

Vado... l'ammazzo e torno was sold in certain markets as **FOR A FEW BULLETS MORE** and in the States as **ANY GUN CAN PLAY**, a bald-faced challenge to Sergio Leone and an all-too appropriate title for a Euroater vying for its place under the Spaghetti Western sun.

Cast opposite Latin leads George Hilton (real name: Jorge Hill Acosta y Lara) and Gilbert Roland (aka Luís Antonio Dámaso de Alonso) is American TV star Edd Byrnes. Born Edward Byrne Breitenberger, Byrnes could never shake his star-making turn as Kookie, the jive-spouting valet of 77 **SUNSET STRIP**. An iconoclast Warners contract denied the actor choice roles in **RIO BRAVO** (1959) and **OCEANS 11** (1960), so Byrnes headed abroad when his series ended to appear as one of a gang of convict spies in Roger Corman's **THE SECRET INVASION** (1964) and in Enzo Castellari's first film, **SEVEN WINCHESTERS FOR A MASSACRE** [*Sette Winchester per un massacro*, 1967]. Blessed with callow good looks, the athletic Byrnes is a worthy partner to costars Gilbert Roland and Hilton; those more familiar with Hilton's sober-sided star turns in such *gialli* as Giuliano Carnimeo's **THE CASE OF THE BLOODY IRIS** and Sergio Martino's **THEY'RE COMING TO GET YOU** will find his performance here uncommonly self-amused, even warm. For all **ANY GUN CAN PLAY** lacks in originality, the balance is more than paid in charm and good humor (which seems more in the spirit of Giuseppe Colizzi than Sergio Leone), with the three actors working well together to sell this once-over-lightly tale of goodness, badness and ugliness across the Mexican border.

Given its intended Techniscope framing, VCI's letterboxed (2.35:1) **ANY GUN CAN PLAY**



*"Scope this, Dad: If we send old Gil, like, over the hill, we can sashay away with the doublooney tunes all the way to Splitsville. Ginchy, no?"
Edd Byrnes sets George Hilton straight in ANY GUN CAN PLAY.*

bests all previous VHS transfers, whose 1.33:1 framing came at a considerable cost to the cinematography of Giovanni Bergamini (**KEOMA**); Bergamini's camera makes excellent use of wide-screen, placing actors at spatial counterpoint to one another and describing arcs around the participants in a game of stalk and capture. Running 97m 17s (belying the stated 105m running time), VCI's all-region disc is 10m longer than the EP tape from New Pacific Pictures, but 2m shorter than the Monterey tape titled **GO KILL AND COME BACK**. What is missing from VCI's DVD hardly counts as crucial material, consisting mostly of tail ends of scenes, of reaction shots from the bathhouse confrontation between Roland and Byrnes and a later conversation between the "sly old jackal" and the "damn gringo" about splitting \$300,000 in gold (a loss to the VCI disc of 1m 35s). Neither the Monterey tape nor the VCI disc can be considered definitive, with each likely representing an alternate cut. (Indeed, VCI's transfer has been taken from a 1971 re-release print.)

VCI's disc is colorful and light on grain (surprising, considering high grain was a side effect of Techniscope, the "poor man's Panavision"), with lifelike skin tones and variegated desert hues. The image appears slightly squeezed and the 2.0 Dolby soundtrack is a bit hissy, but these deficits are not instantly noticeable. Only Gilbert Roland provides his own dubbing, rattling off invectives in untranslated Spanish and insulting George Hilton's bounty killer as "the big *maricon*."

Easily the best-looking presentation in VCI's "Spaghetti Western Collection," **ANY GUN CAN PLAY** nonetheless suffers from inferior packaging, which makes the title look like a bland *ranchera*. Although the film concerns the struggle over a booty of \$300,000, VCI's keepcase copy ups the ante to a million dollars (as did re-release posters of the film through the '70s). The disc has been given 12 chapters and extras are limited to letterboxed trailers for **ANY GUN CAN PLAY** (2m 53s) and **A BULLET FOR SANDOVAL** (3m 53s), the shorter American cut of Julio Buchs' **Los desperados** (1969),

which also stars George Hilton and is available from VCI in a very nice letterboxed transfer.

Somewhere between the pained sobriety of **FIND A PLACE TO DIE** and the sticky fingered insouciance of **ANY GUN CAN PLAY** beats the divided heart of Tonino Cervi's **TODAY WE KILL... TOMORROW WE DIE!**. Released from prison, where he has served five years for a crime he did not commit, Bill Kiowa (**RETURN OF THE FLY** star Brett Halsey, billed as "Montgomery Wood") seeks to avenge the rape and murder of his Indio wife at the hands of the renegade Elfego (Japanese actor Tatsuya Nakadai in Mexican drag), who compounded the offense by framing his former friend for bank robbery. With money safeguarded during his incarceration, Bill recruits a capable crew of "real gunfighters": the surly O'Banion (Bud Spencer), bored peacekeeper Jeff Milton (American TV actor Wayne Preston), ladies man Bunny Fox (Franco Borelli) and card sharp Francis "Colt" Morgan (William Berger), whom Bill and his gang must first bail out of an Abilene jail and then save from some

gamblers he cheated at cards. Following the bloody trail of Elfego's "mighty powerful mob" of half-breeds from the scene of a savage Wells Fargo robbery, Bill and O'Banion are captured by Elfego and tortured ("You'll die hard, Kiowa... hard!"). When Elfego splits off to intercept a military escort bearing \$100,000, Milton, Fox and Moran rescue Bill and O'Banion and give chase, catching up with Elfego at night in a crow-haunted forest for a lethal game of payback.

TODAY WE KILL... TOMORROW WE DIE! was co-written by Dario Argento, who contributed to the scripts for Sergio Leone's **ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST** [*C'era una volta il West*, 1968] and Robert Hossein's **CEMETERY WITHOUT CROSSES** [*Cimitero senza croci*, 1968] while still a film critic with the left wing Italian newspaper *PAESE SERA*. In 1966, Argento was in an adjacent dubbing studio when Leone was mixing the calls of various birds of prey into the soundtrack for **THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY**; it's tempting to believe this chance

encounter influenced Argento's directorial debut, **THE BIRD WITH THE CRYSTAL PLUMAGE** [*L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo*, 1969], in which the caw of a rare bird helps unmask a serial killer. Despite rumors that Argento directed parts of **TODAY WE KILL... TOMORROW WE DIE!**, star Brett Halsey has denied the gossip in several printed interviews, and there is very little about the finished film (apart from the vocalizations of crows as an augury of doom) that is expressly Argentovian. **TODAY WE KILL... TOMORROW WE DIE!** remains an atypical, cold Western particularized by its mossy forest setting; shot by Sergio D'Offizi (**DON'T TORTURE THE DUCKLING, CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST**) in the first months of 1967 north of Rome in the ancient wood at Manziana, the film has an eldritch ambiance that at times recalls the fiction of Ambrose Bierce while looking ahead to the quasi-Gothic American Westerns **THE GREAT NORTHFIELD, MINNESOTA RAID** (1972), **THE MISSOURI BREAKS** (1976) and **THE LONG RIDERS** (1980).

An air of facetiousness dilutes the tension of this revenge western; while Halsey brings the proper note of brooding to his role ("I don't have any feelings—except maybe hate"), he's saddled with future "Trinity" co-star Bud Spencer (aka Carlo Pedersoli), playing the comic foil prone to running away from fights and being the butt of fat jokes. Wayde Preston (one-time husband of **HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL**'s Carol Ohmart), William Berger and stuntman/actor Franco Borelli (billed as "Stanley Gordon") all have charisma to burn, but the proceedings never feel appropriately anguished or matched to the production's funereal aspect. (**PRINCESS BRIDE** fans might find themselves chuckling every time Bill Kiowa approaches a stranger with the line "This here's five thousand dollars..." remembering Mandy Patinkin's oft-repeated "My name is Inigo Montoya..." speech). Tatsuya Nakadai (seen in a number of films for Akira Kurosawa) is an interesting choice to play the venal Elfego, but when the film's climax finds the actor brandishing a

Brett Halsey in one of his two "Montgomery Wood" pictures, the Dario Argento-scripted TODAY WE KILL... TOMORROW WE DIE!



machete in the matter of a *chambara* swordsman, one feels knocked out of the story. While consistently entertaining (and graced with a great, if not classic score by Angelo Francesco Lavagnino), **TODAY WE KILL... TOMORROW WE DIE!** never overcomes the feel of a missed opportunity.

VCI's Region-1 disc of **TODAY WE KILL... TOMORROW WE DIE!** is closer in quality to **FIND A PLACE TO DIE** than **ANY GUN CAN PLAY**; the letterboxed (1.85:1) image is grainy and dun-colored, with disappointing contrasts and throughout looking a step or two down from first generation clarity. There is occasional scratching and a split frame here and there, but the presentation is generally watchable. The Dolby Digital sound is on par with the visuals, being somewhat degraded and less than robust. The film has been given 18 chapters. The keepcase cites an erroneous 102m running time. Extras are limited to the same trailers for **ANY GUN CAN PLAY** and **A BULLET FOR SANDOVAL**.

I DRINK YOUR BLOOD

1971, *Box Office Spectaculars/*
Necrophagia.com, DD-5.1 & 2.0/
MA/+, OOP, 83m 32s, DVD-1
By Stephen R. Bisette

Upon its release in the spring of 1971, David Durston's **I DRINK YOUR BLOOD** gained instant notoriety for its lurid title and outrageous level of onscreen violence. Most of us who caught the film during its initial theatrical release could only guess at how violent the film might be. Slapped with an "X" rating by the MPAA for its abundant carnage, Cinemation Industries honcho Jerry Gross reportedly instructed theaters to personally trim the uncut prints already en route to their initial venues, resulting in a



Pete (Riley Mills) will show those hippies who dosed his grandpa on LSD—he'll dose them back with the blood of a rabid dog!
From I DRINK YOUR BLOOD.

plethora of different edits that thereafter traveled the country on a double-bill with Del Tenney's retitled **I EAT YOUR SKIN** (a tepid, anachronistic B&W voodoo thriller lensed in Florida in 1964 under the title **ZOMBIE**, aka **VOODOO BLOOD BATH**, aka **ZOMBIES**). The VARIETY article announcing the MPAA's decision might have slipped into obscurity, were it not for Joe Dante's review of the film in CASTLE OF FRANKENSTEIN; Dante's praise for the film and ire at the MPAA only cemented **I DRINK YOUR BLOOD**'s bloody reputation, while rumors of the multiple versions of the film fueled its growing cult status. Revival screenings and the various video editions confirmed that there were indeed more than one edit of the film in circulation. This made it impossible to peg any single copy as being "uncut" or definitive, which only added to the film's mystique.

Clearly derivative of George A. Romero's **NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD** (a debt acknowledged in the film via a drive-in ad sheet

glimpsed on the wall of a bakery), inspired by the notorious Manson cult and murders, and utterly of its time (as a gore opus and a "hippie hate film," simultaneously exploiting countercultural fears and fears of the counterculture), **I DRINK YOUR BLOOD** hit drive-in screens like a bombshell back in '71. The film holds a special place in my heart for being the only horror film that ever prompted threats of physical violence against me. My high-school friend Alan Finn, who accompanied me to the Twin City Drive-In showing—on the Barré-Montpelier Road, Vermont—was so incensed by **I DRINK YOUR BLOOD** that he refused to stay for the second feature, promising to beat me senseless and take my car if I didn't immediately drive us home. Only one other film had similarly affected Alan (**NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD**, natch), instantly elevating **I DRINK YOUR BLOOD** in my personal pantheon of beloved 1970s horrors. Mind you, the film's volatile brew of sociopathic behavior, revenge, nudity, acid,

Satanic rites, rabies, garrotings, stabbings, dismemberment, decapitation, self-immolation, suicide, abuse of rats and pregnant women, foaming-at-the-mouth longhairs and construction workers, and frenzied violence would have sufficed without Alan's brute revulsion enhancing my memories. Though no blood was sipped or flesh supped (the film does *not* involve cannibalism, despite its position on many such lists), **I DRINK YOUR BLOOD** was that rare item that lived up to its hype.

Now, Box Office Spectaculars' signed, limited "Deluxe Edition" DVD release of **I DRINK YOUR BLOOD** finally delivers the seemingly impossible: the uncut, uncensored "X" rated theatrical version, and—through the techno miracle of "seamless branching"—Durston's original "director's cut," which incorporates approximately 8m of additional footage that is, frankly, best viewed separately under the supplemental heading of "Deleted Scenes." (The branching is not so seamless, causing an irritating pause as the disc rummages around for the correct scene to reinsert.) Durston himself provided the materials, supervised the transfer and audio commentary (with the film's star, Bhaskar—who died within weeks of the disc's release) and moderated the extras, which are abundant.

Shot under the title **PHOBIA** in a ghost town near Sharon Springs, New York, **I DRINK YOUR BLOOD** immediately establishes its tone with Clay Pitts' distinctive score and a nude midnight-mass-'round-the-campfire led by the exotic Horace Bones (Bhaskar, aka Bhaskar Roy Chowdhury), stridently praying to Satan. When a local girl (Arlene Farber) is caught watching the ritual, she is captured and raped (offscreen—a rare instance of restraint). The ravaged girl is found by her little

brother Pete (Riley Mills) and heroine Mildred Nash (Elizabeth Brooks, later Marner-Brooks), who rush her to the care of her veterinarian grandfather Doc Banner (Richard Bowler). Mildred confronts construction foreman Roger Davis (John McCook, credited as "John Damon") believing Sylvia was raped by members of his crew; as Roger assures her otherwise, Horace and his cronies—Andy (Tyde Kierney), Rollo (George Patterson), Sylvia (Iris Brooks), Soo-Lin (Jadine Wong), pregnant Molly (Rhonda Fultz), the ill-fated Shelley (Alex Mann) and mute Carrie (an uncredited Lynn Lowry in her screen debut)—squat in a nearby derelict house. Pete reports their arrival to Doc Banner, who takes up his rifle and drops in on the coven mid-ritual. Caught off guard by Horace, the old man is beaten and released after being dosed with LSD ("Have a breath-freshener, handsome—makes you stay sweet for hours!"). As Doc endures a bad trip, his angry grandson shoots a rabid dog in the woods, drawing infected blood from the canine to spike a batch of fresh meat pies fresh out of Mildred's bakery ovens, which infect the unsuspecting coven. The rabies soon takes its toll, prompting bizarre, increasingly violent behavior from the Bones bunch. Sylvia is picked up by Roger's hardhat crew and gang-raped, thus infecting them. With the break of dawn, Valley Hills is besieged by the rabid coven and rampaging construction workers, culminating in a final bloody massacre between contaminated conservatives and pagans in and around Mildred's bakery.

Durston's credentials (professed in the DVD's filmography) hardly anticipated this, his first and only "gore" film, which embraces its excesses with energetic zeal. As he makes clear in his

commentary and bonus interviews, Durston had no interest in horror films. Turning 50 shortly after the release of the film, Durston likewise had no generational link to the youth audience **I DRINK YOUR BLOOD** so gleefully assaults, though he claims in his commentary to have taken LSD under the supervision of a doctor to prepare for his 1965 pic **THE LOVE DRUG** (thus beating Roger Corman to the "punch"). The flashes of explicit mayhem in the director's cut indeed enliven the proceedings, restoring long-missing glimpses of Irvin Carlton's gore effects while detailing the fate of at least one character during the manic climactic siege (a decapitation that had been trimmed from every version I'd seen before, though some prints retained shots of the severed head wielded like a trophy). Unlike most horror films (including **NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD**), **I DRINK YOUR BLOOD** saved its most gruesome atrocities for the finale's massacre in the bright light of day.

Typical of its ilk, there is precious little scientific or medical logic to the incubation of the disease that foments so much bloodshed, and more than a few laughs at the cartoony literalizations of "hydrophobia" (axe-and-machete-wielding rabid madmen flee at the sight of water; at the peak of mayhem, Rollo apparently succumbs from being sprayed in the face with a hose). The butchery is occasionally bemusing, too, as when Rollo tries to stir a twitch or two out of an already-quite-dead hare before bashing it against a tree, or when the death throes of the local longjohn-wearing snake farmer ("See the Giunt Boah Konstriker") ensues with the prompt loss of his dentures.

The cast play it straight, with child actor Riley Mills oddly

anchoring the grim proceedings via the earnest gravity he brings to his role. *Sans* a word of dialogue, Lynn Lowry brings willowy allure to her slight role (as Durston explains, Lowry was discovered after the script's roles had been cast and too pretty to refuse, hence her character's mute status); Rhonda Fultz lends the pregnant Molly enough presence to make her sorrowful demise genuinely affecting amid the cacophony of the final act, while professional dancers Bhaskar and George Patterson savor their eye-rolling and scenery-chewing. The most maladroitness *bon mots* are reserved for Durston himself, appearing (uncredited) as the town doctor, tipping his sardonic view of the film's content. After Roger drops the first machete-waving rabid worker with a bullet to the head, Durston exclaims, "Davis, I've got to call the Red Cross!"—and the film closes with the quip, "At least the poor bastards have been put out of their misery, 'cuz death by hydrophobia is agony" (which beats the hell out of his alternate ending reading, which concludes "Death by hydrophobia is one hell of a thing").

Durston is nothing but outspoken in his commentary and interviews, lionizing his creation and collaborators while downplaying the relevance of **NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD** and noting that Romero's later **THE CRAZIES** (aka **CODE NAME: TRIXIE**) borrowed from **I DRINK YOUR BLOOD**. (Don't be too quick to dismiss Durston's claims: along with the premise of a town overwhelmed by the outbreak of a sanity-eroding disease, **THE CRAZIES** also featured Lynn Lowry as an ill-fated waif—and a priest who sets himself ablaze, anticipated here in Soo-Lin's spiteful self-immolation,

both echoing newsreels of the Vietnamese monks who protested that war by setting themselves afire.) More surprising is Durston and Bhaskar's claim that the rat who played "Ben" in the popular 1970s shockers **WILLARD** (1972) and **BEN** (1973) appears in this film (Chapter 24, 40:30-40:40), and Durston's peevish ire at Tyde Kierney for revealing his nickname (which we won't reveal here) at the end of their on-camera interview in the "I DRINK YOUR BLOOD" SHOW supplement: after several attempts to change the subject, Durston abruptly cuts the actor off and moves on to his next guest!

The DVD transfer of this wild-and-woolly gorefest is as fine as one might hope, and surprisingly uncompromised considering the abundance of extras. The image quality is very crisp and clean with vivid, digitally pumped-up color, in which skintones sometimes favor pink more than they should. Though Cinemation's ad mats for both **I DRINK YOUR BLOOD** and **I EAT YOUR SKIN** claimed the films to be in "widescreen," they were likely 1.66:1 soft-matted presentations of the open-aperture, standard framed footage seen here. The audio track defaults to a new 5.1 stereo mix, which is appropriately intimidating, and the original mono track is also present to please the purists.

Along with the already mentioned commentary track and interviews (with Lowry, Kierney, Damon, and the canny publicity man who created the titles for the Cinemation double-bill), the bonuses include four deleted scenes, including the "Original Downbeat Ending" (which is properly set up in both the theatrical and director's cut, if you watch closely—see Chapter 47, 1:20:25-30), an additional 3m 7s

of outtakes, a gallery of nine trailers (including Grindhouse's re-release of **CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST** and the inadvertently hilarious **AN AMERICAN HIPPIE IN ISRAEL**) along with **IDYB**'s trailer and radio spots, promotional stills, posters, and art. The select filmographies also offer the trailer for **THE CRAZIES** (hidden in Lowry's filmography) and Bhaskar's *Nagar Nirtham* ("The Evil King Cobra Dance," presumably excerpted from the short film **DANCES OF INDIA**, accessible from the final page of Bhaskar's bio and filmography), a poignant reminder of the performer's uncanny abilities prior to the tragic 1977 stage accident that left him paralyzed for the last 25 years of his life. Durston's bio/filmography also offers footage of L.A. TIMES critic Kevin Thomas presenting Durston with the Cult Movies 2002 award (and mistakenly referring to its co-feature as **I EAT YOUR FLESH**). But the most fun extra of all, I daresay, is the animated menu itself, which inventively revamps tableaux of the feature's most violent setpieces. Click on the severed head lying on the car wreckage to access the opening credits only of **I EAT YOUR SKIN**—sadly, a shoddy cropped transfer from a poor print. (For a sharp, complete, uncut—including minor gore edited from TV and prior VHS releases—DVD presentation of that co-feature, see the special features on Something Weird's **THE CHILD**). Quick! Click on the axe on the "Bonuses" menu for a bloodier surprise.

As for the different edits of **I DRINK YOUR BLOOD**'s theatrical prints, Durston confirms the facts herein, noting that facing the cancellation of bookings after VARIETY's announcement of the MPAA's "X" rating, Cinemation indeed notified theater owners to cut



*Our more sensitive readers may not wish to look at the photo above, from David Durston's **I DRINK YOUR BLOOD**.*

the prints manually to their own "R" standards. There were 280 venues, all cut differently; Durston supervised the trims of the New York and California prints only (see commentary track for Chapter 18, 28:36-31:15).

Alas, the original 500-copy run of the signed (by Durston, Bhaskar and most of the cast) limited "deluxe edition" is already sold out as of this writing, and claiming over \$250 in Ebay auctions. A mass-market edition is forthcoming, and Necrophagia reportedly still has "a number of non-autographed, non-numbered copies available," though quantities are limited (go to <http://www.necrophagia.com/idrink.html>).

NOIR VOLUME 1: SHADES OF DARKNESS

*2001, ADV Films, DD-5.1/MA/
16:9/LB/ST/+, \$29.90,
121m 40s, DVD-1*

NOIR VOLUME 2: THE HIT LIST

*2001, ADV Films, DD-5.1/MA/
16:9/LB/ST/+, \$30.00,
97m 20s, DVD-1*

NOIR VOLUME 3: THE FIRING CHAMBER

*2001, ADV Films, DD-5.1/MA/
16:9/LB/ST/+, \$30.00,
73m, DVD-1*

By Shane M. Dallmann

There are no demons or robotic warriors to be found here; nor is there explicit sexual content or graphic gore on hand—

but the anime series **NOIR** compels nonetheless with its mature themes of lost human identity in a sinister world. If **NOIR** were to be adapted as a live-action film, the ideal director would be Luc Besson; indeed, the series is primarily set in France. But animation proves the ideal medium for writer Ryoe Tsukimura's concept and the approach of director Kouichi Mashimo.

After the opening titles of each episode, "Noir" is defined as an ancient fate, embodied in two maidens who govern death. The modern embodiment of said fate is introduced in the opener, "Maidens With Black Hands." Beautiful, blonde Mireille Bouquet is a professional hit woman who, as the story begins, is lured via the Internet to a meeting with



Blonde, beautiful Mireille is a professional hit woman in the stylish anime NOIR.

a total stranger. Before she can make the acquaintance of the mysterious brunette who apparently summoned her, she's set upon by an array of gunmen and must fight for her life—but her elusive charge proves equally adept at the game of death. After the smoke clears, we learn that the mystery woman's identification suggests that her name is Kirika Yumura—but she has no memory of her past and knows herself only as "Noir." Though Mireille doesn't quite understand why, she finds herself drawn into a leery partnership with the stranger.

In "Daily Bread," Mireille and Noir tackle their first assignment together. A bombing in France has targeted the anti-terrorist unit GIGN—but the job isn't as simple as nailing the culprit. The hit ladies must eliminate not only the members of the People's Armed Alliance (who planned and executed the bombing), but the GIGN insider who commissioned the job in the first place. The episode title refers to Noir's acceptance of how she and Mireille

make their living—and the fact that she can never feel sad about killing other people.

The plot thickens drastically in "The Assassination Play." The target is wealthy businessman Albert Dux—and his convenient placement at a resort he's preparing to open makes things preposterously easy—or so it seems. The women have been set up—by parties yet unknown—for an elaborate contest. We learn that the name "Noir" carries with it the reputation of an assassin to be especially feared and respected: but is Kirika this same Noir? As mentioned earlier, there is no graphic bloodshed in this series (so far), but the creative violence carries plenty of impact. Though placed at an extreme disadvantage—in the dark, against foes with night-vision goggles—Noir is able to tip the odds in her favor with nothing more than a handful of popcorn; while Mireille has a fateful encounter with a woman that she took to be the widow of a recently murdered corporate president. Might she be able to

explain who has arranged this situation—and why—before it's too late?

"The Sound of Waves" sends the women to the fictional coastal country of Ulgia, where their target is Hammond, the president of the Atride Corporation—an international security agency on the surface, but an arranger of *coups d'état* in reality. As Hammond braces himself for the imminent arrival of Noir, his plans are complicated by the unexpected arrival of his 15 year-old daughter Rosalie, who wants to spend her birthday with him. The violence in this episode is as low-key as ever, but Noir's climactic, nearly wordless meeting with Rosalie ranks as one of the most emotionally powerful moments seen in the field.

Concluding **VOLUME 1** is "Les Soldats." Mireille responds to a call from a contact named Vanel, only to find that he and his entire family have been killed prior to their meeting. It's soon apparent that the mysterious "they" are once again manipulating the partners—either setting them up for the kill or steering them towards information that may unlock the secrets of Kimika's past—and perhaps also Mireille's (both women experience telling flashbacks). And a parchment found under ancient bones in a large sepulchre tells them that their opponents are known as... "Les Soldats."

NOIR makes an occasional visual stumble when it comes to English-language documents—the character known as "Rosalie" in the subtitles is referred to as "Rosaly" on a computer screen, while a clue-laden bottle of whisky in the fifth episode announces the date in which it was "dibtilled"—but these are minor concerns. The visuals are beautiful throughout; they display the influence of the film genre for

which the series was named, but don't attempt to slavishly recreate it: the bright, sunny sequences are as equally important as the dark, shadowy ones—while violence and danger can suddenly erupt from either atmosphere. Each episode has been assigned the usual five chapters on the disc, while the original commercial bumpers have been retained. The image is presented in 16:9 anamorphic widescreen, and the 5.1 Dolby Digital Surround resonates in both the English and Japanese-language versions (removable English subtitles are, of course, provided for the latter). Subtitles for the opening and closing songs (“Coppelia’s Casket” and “Beautiful Emotions,” respectively) alternate between English and phonetic Japanese, depending on the chosen episode. Striking, full-motion menu screens direct the viewer to the episodes, their respective chapter stops, and ADV’s usual generous supply of extras: production sketches, “clean” opening and closing title sequences, original

Japanese promotional materials and trailers for other ADV releases. Specific manipulation of the menus can reveal such “Easter Eggs” as extra sketches and an audio interview with the principal voice artist, but viewer should be allowed to find these details on their own—particularly as ADV has thoughtfully included a pair of “decoder” glasses with which to find a cryptic clue in the liner notes! But with or without the extra games, this first volume of **NOIR** will undoubtedly leave the viewer anxious for more.

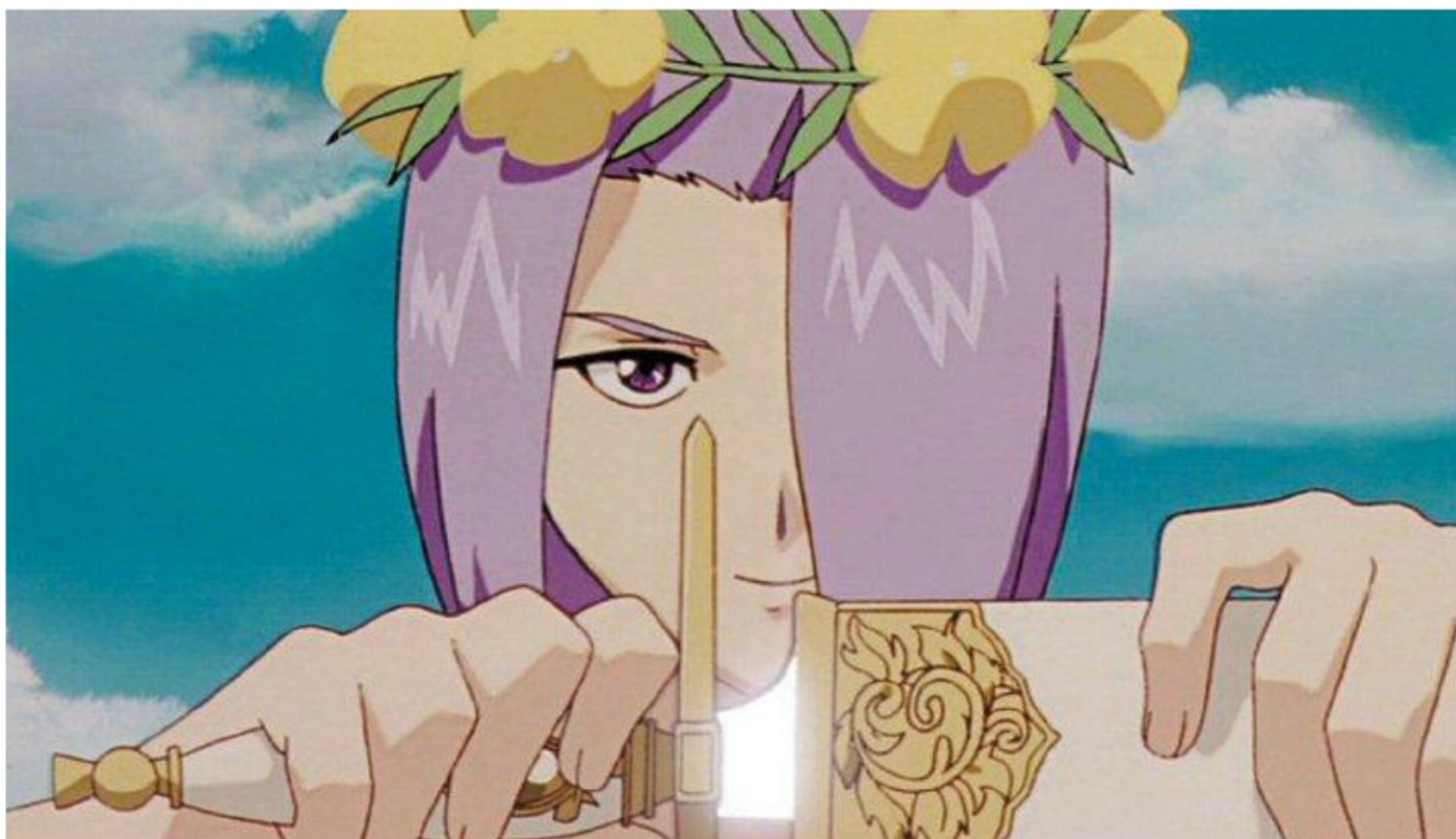
Whereas **VOLUME 1** provides five episodes, **NOIR VOLUME 2: THE HIT LIST** contains only four. As with all series entries, each is precisely TV-timed to 24m 20s, commercial “bumpers” and “next episode” previews included. The “Lost Kitten” adopted by Kirika in the opener is actually named Prince Myshkin (after Dostoevsky’s “Idiot”) and belongs to ex-KGB official Yuri Nazarov. Nazarov becomes the source of a moral dilemma: can the assassins carry out their assignment

and kill the kindly, much-loved old man who lives in a state of perpetual atonement for his crimes of long ago (including the executions he ordered)?

“The Black Thread of Fate” opens ominously as Mireille contemplates shooting a wounded, helpless Kirika—who seems to welcome the idea, thanking Mireille for putting up with her as long as she has... Flashbacks detail the ill-fated mission that put Kirika in this compromising position to begin with—and during the course of this adventure, Mireille comes to understand that “Noir” is a name for two” (as the prologue of each episode spells out). There’s more blood than usual in this episode, but restraint is still the order of the day: while gunplay is plentiful, no bullets are ever shown striking their human targets.

Rounding out **VOLUME 2** are “Acte I” and “Acte II” of “*Intoccabile*” (“Untouchable”). New York provides the setting for a war between the Cosa Nostra and a Mexican contingent. The situation becomes severe enough

*Mireille’s childhood friend Silvana—aka the **Intoccabile**—may be even deadlier than she.*





Chloe—another NOIR assassin—is sent to kill a General in Episode 12, “The Assassination Mission.”

for crime boss Don Salvatore to give the order “Summon the *Intoccabile!*,” knowing full well that such an order can’t be given lightly, as drastic consequences await both sides. Kirika and, particularly, Mirielle, are drawn deeply into the conflict as well—the *Intoccabile* happens to be Mirielle’s childhood friend Silvana, and she’s perhaps even more deadly than the women known as Noir. The action is intense and the second half contains a definite series highlight: Kirika’s escape from an apparently hopeless situation would probably have provoked a round of applause from a startled audience had this been a live-action theatrical feature.

NOIR VOLUME 3: THE FIRING CHAMBER is slimmer than its predecessors, containing a mere three episodes. “The True Noir” introduces a third major character to the series, as Mirielle and Kirika find themselves credited with completing jobs they were hired for—but that, in truth, they were beaten to by a mysterious

competitor known as Chloe. The “new girl in town” also lays claim to the legendary name of “Noir,” and she has the skills to support that claim.

The women receive the opportunity to learn more answers when they’re contacted by a Soldat loyalist. To Mirielle’s displeasure, Kirika welcomes the intruder to a “Moonlit Tea Party” in Episode 11—though, of course, each must remain on guard lest the other strike without warning...

Finally, the “Assassination Mission” of Episode 12 is carried out by Chloe (who shares a remote headquarters known as The Manor with a mother-figure named Altena). Chloe’s job is to kill one General Dieter Reimann in his mountain hideaway—and Reimann does little to avoid it. Another character willing to accept the inevitable, the General orders his security staff to leave Chloe alone—and Chloe returns the favor by protecting Reimann from *other* assassins until the time comes for her to do the job herself. This episode is noteworthy

for the complete absence of Mirielle and Kirika.

The sparsity of **VOLUME 3** is doubly frustrating: one might be tempted to accept this arrangement of episodes as the only way to contain a single season of **NOIR** on three discs without breaking up the two-part story; but the fact of the matter is that the first season finale, “Season of Hell,” has not been included here when it very easily could have been. The viewer will have to pick up **NOIR VOLUME 4: DEATH WARRANT** in order to see this episode and then launch immediately into Season Two, beginning with **NOIR VOLUME 5: TERMINAL VELOCITY**, also currently available. (The series consists of 26 episodes total, which will be contained on seven volumes. At the time of writing, only the final volume remains unreleased.) While there can be little doubt that those who have come this far will want to continue, the completion of the first season on the third volume of **NOIR** would have demonstrated

appropriate faith in the fans of the series.

As was the case with **VOLUME 1**, both of these discs offer a widescreen image enhanced for 16:9 playback, Dolby Digital 5.1 Surround Sound for both the Japanese and English-language soundtracks, optional English subtitles (also available in “title song only” mode), production sketches, “clean” opening and closing title sequences, Japanese promos and trailers for other ADV offerings. Exclusive to **VOLUME 3** is a 4m 40s interview with Houko Kuwashima, the voice of Kirika. It is also assumed that the viewer kept his decoder glasses from **VOLUME 1**—there are more hidden clues in the liner inserts, and more Easter Eggs await discovery throughout both discs. ADV also offers a collector’s package consisting of **VOLUME 1**, a **NOIR** T-shirt, and a case designed to hold all seven volumes.

QUAI DES ORFEVRES

1947, Criterion DD-2.0/ST/+, \$29.95, 107m 3s, DVD-1

By Tim Lucas

Made after *Le Corbeau* (1943) and before he challenged Hitchcock head-on as a master of suspense with *Les Salaires de la Peur* [US: *THE WAGES OF FEAR*, 1953] and *Les Diaboliques* [US: *DIABOLIQUE*, 1955], this is the least-known of Henri-Georges Clouzot’s great suspenseurs in America. When music hall singer Jenny Lamour (Suzy Delair) courts the interest of a hunchbacked erotophile (Charles Dullin) with ties to the film industry, her husband Maurice (Bernard Blier) threatens to kill the procurer if he approaches his wife again. These words come back to haunt him when the occasion inevitably arises; he sneaks out with a revolver in his pocket,

drives to the man’s house, and finds him dead on the floor with his head bashed in—by a champagne bottle wielded earlier by his wife. A frightened Jenny confides in photographer Dora (Simone Renant), a childhood friend of Maurice’s whom she suspects of secretly loving him, and panics when she realizes she left a fox stole at the crime scene—which Dora retrieves because she is secretly in love... with Jenny. Maurice, whose getaway car is stolen, becomes the likeliest suspect of Inspector Antoine (Louis Jouvet) and succumbs to despair, uncertain of his wife’s guilt or innocence, or indeed of any of the machinations defining the societal trap in which he finds himself ensnared.

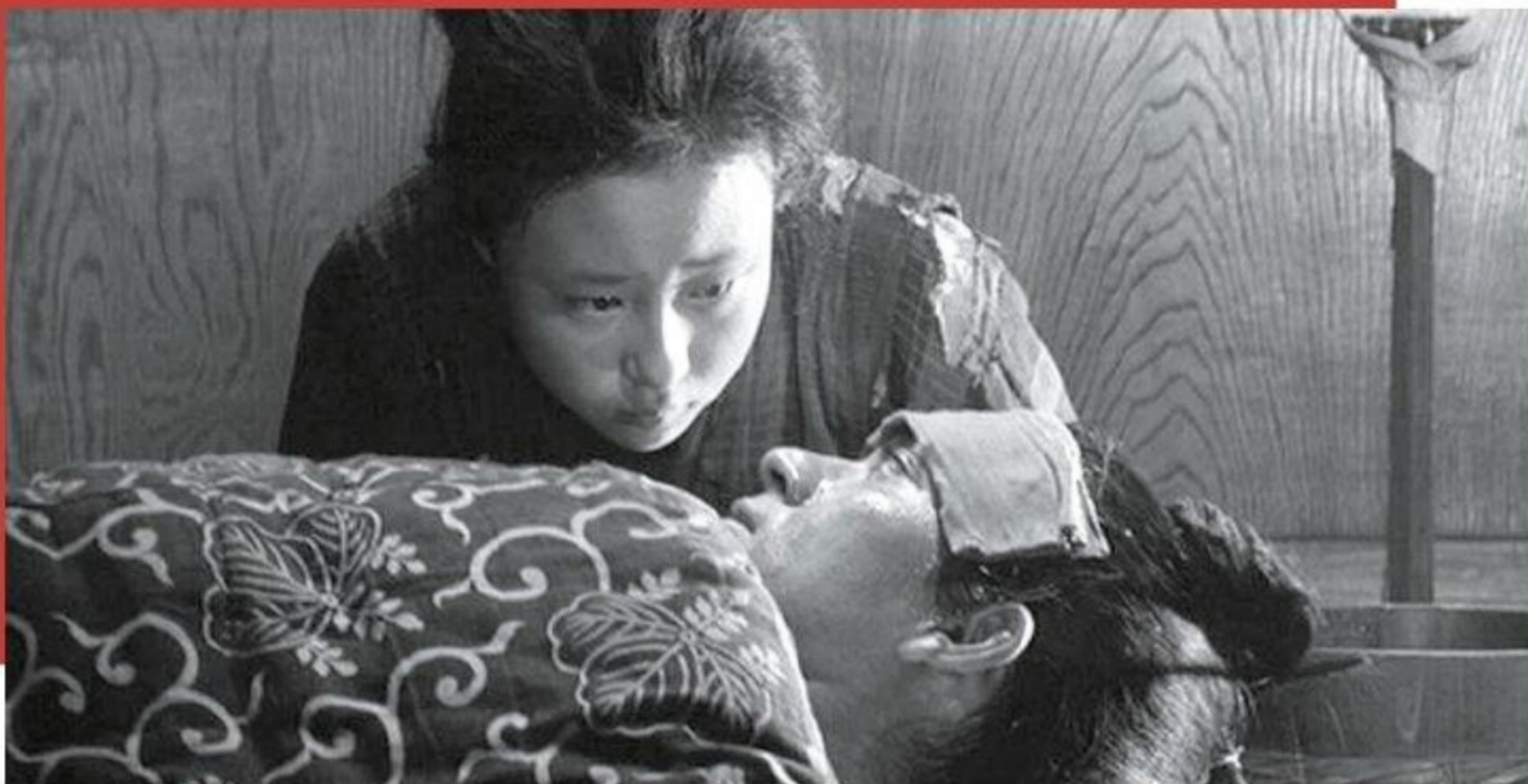
Loosely based on a novel by Stanislas-André Steeman, this is a first-rate intellectual thriller with a sprawling Dickensian cast of eccentrics, a delicious sub-strata of double lives and secret sexualities (which may or may not include the Inspector, a white single male who lives with a black child he calls “son”), and a simultaneous

loathing and sympathy for humankind that anticipates Hitchcock’s own *THE WRONG MAN* (1956). Made the year after Capra’s *IT’S A WONDERFUL LIFE*, this is a similarly dark story about the interrelationships within a small town at Christmas time, but it cuts deeper into the darkness; its outlook is actually brighter than that of *Le Corbeau*, but this may well be the more complex film.

Criterion has brought *Quai des Orfèvres* (the title references a street that figures in the story) to DVD in a high-definition, dual-layered standard transfer that has the mineral gleam of a nitrate print. It’s very nearly perfect, compromised only by two or three mild splice bumps; the stylized chiaroscuro cinematography of Armand Thirard is often breathtaking. The mono sound is excellent and the subtitles not only accompany Delair’s songs but accompany them *in rhyme*, while also encompassing some PG-level profanity. An engrossing 17m excerpt from a 1971 episode of the French TV series *À L’ÉCART*

*‘Twas the night before Christmas and all
through the house, not a creature was stirring...
the scene of a crime in H.G. Clouzot’s QUAI DES ORFEVRES.*





Illness, as a metaphor for the failings of the material world, governs Akira Kurosawa's last film of the 1960s, RED BEARD.

CE SOIR interviews Clouzot and the three principals, with the two women not looking a day older. A digitally recreated theatrical trailer (3m 27s) is included, as well as an eye-pleasing gallery of colorful European poster art. Excellent liner notes by Luc Sante are provided on an enclosure that folds out to reveal a head-to-toe shot of Jenny Lamour in her sauciest stagewear, and the disc is boldly labelled with an image of near nudity that occurs fleetingly in the film, startling those of us who tend not to think of 1947 as a very sexy year in cinema.

RED BEARD

Akahige

1965, *The Criterion Collection*,
DD-4.0/16:9/LB/MA/+,
184m 52s, \$39.95, DVD-1

By Rebecca & Sam Umland

Based on a novel by Shugoro Yamamoto—who had written the story upon which **SANJURO** (1962) was based—**RED BEARD** was Akira Kurosawa's last film of the 1960s, his last shot in B&W, and—as it turned out—the last film he would make with Toshiro

Mifune. He would not direct another film until the low-budget **Dodesukaden** in 1970 (also based on the work of Yamamoto), as he then struggled to make films in the years following—films that would only occasionally flicker with the brilliance shown in his work of the early years. Thus, for many critics and fans of Kurosawa's work, **RED BEARD** is the film that marked the beginning of his artistic decline—which is not to suggest that **RED BEARD** is mere run-of-the-mill fare.

The plot of **RED BEARD** is rather straightforward—there is no modernist experimentation with narrative form as in **RASHOMON** (1950), for instance, nor the hard-edged, fast-paced contemporary narrative of **HIGH AND LOW** [*Tengoku to Jigoku*, “Heaven and Hell,” 1963] the film that preceded **RED BEARD**. Virtually all of the action occurs in and around the Koishikawa Clinic in Edo, where Noboru Yasumoto (Yuzo Kayama, the samurai leader in **SANJURO** and one of the most popular movie stars of '60s Japan), a young, egotistical student just out of medical

school in Nagasaki, returns. He stops at the Koishikawa Clinic—a public clinic that administers health care mostly to the poor and disenfranchised—to pay his respects to Kyojo Niidé (Toshiro Mifune, called Akahige or “Red Beard”), the head doctor. The ambitious Yasumoto is chagrined when he learns that he is to remain at Red Beard's public clinic, tending to the poor. He rebels by consistently breaking the rules and by refusing to wear a uniform, and, despite being warned against it, begins to visit the pavilion where a mysterious and beautiful female patient (Kyoko Kagawa) is kept locked away. Soon, the girl escapes and appears in Yasumoto's room, where she begins to seduce him. Beautiful but insane, the girl plans to murder him, but Red Beard appears and saves Yasumoto's life. Humbled, the young doctor begins to take a greater interest in the clinic, and is assigned to minister to a dying old man (Kamatari Fujiwara), his first real experience with actual death, which he finds horrible. He learns from another intern, Handayu

Mori (Yoshio Tsuchiya), that Red Beard has taught him to look beyond the reality of the patient's death to the reality of the patient's heart and soul. Eventually, in a moment of insight that hearkens back to **RASHOMON**, Yasumoto decides to act according to the good, denying the reality of death, and the story achieves a quietly transcendent conclusion.

Death is omnipresent in **RED BEARD**. Initially, Yasumoto is revolted by the smell of the clinic, and he despises the flea-bitten patients lying on their *tatami*, all of whom are poorly clothed, sick, miserable, and dying. In a sense, the setting—the Koishikawa clinic—functions as a metaphor for the (fallen) material world, much like the dilapidated Rashomon gate in **RASHOMON**. Although the great Mifune plays the film's titular character, the real protagonist is Yasumoto—who is to make some painful discoveries, both about what it means to be a doctor as well as about the nature of his own self-delusions. In addition to its fine cast, **RED BEARD** is meticulous in its period recreation of the late Tokugawa (19th century) period of Japan. In his striving for realistic detail, Kurosawa took almost two years to make the film. At the time, the film set the record in Japan for the length of its production—longer even than **SEVEN SAMURAI** (1954). While **RED BEARD** doesn't have the bold experimentation of early films such as **RASHOMON**, or the action of films such as **SEVEN SAMURAI**, or the intricate plotting of films such as **THE HIDDEN FORTRESS**, it perhaps represents Kurosawa's clearest philosophical statement, and for this reason we happily recommend it to enthusiasts of his work as well as those who want to discover the compelling moral vision of one of the world's masters of the cinema.

Criterion's transfer of the B&W film, taken from a 35mm fine-grain master positive, is clear and crisp. The film has been nicely letterboxed at 2.30:1 from its original Tohoscope ratio of 2:35:1. The DD-4.0 soundtrack is likewise clear and free of annoying background noise, created from the original 4-track magnetic master at 24-bit. The disc has been allotted 38 chapter stops, and contains two forms of scholarly apparatus. The booklet's liner notes are excerpted from the chapter on **RED BEARD** in Donald Richie's **THE FILMS OF AKIRA KUROSAWA**, and Richie is also credited with the optional English subtitle translations. While Richie did the audio commentary for Criterion's DVD issue of **RASHOMON**, **RED BEARD** contains an audio commentary by film scholar Stephen Prince, who reiterates much of the information originally documented in Richie's book on Kurosawa, although he provides additional information on the nuances of story and character. The film's original 3m 55s theatrical trailer rounds out the supplements.

SINDERELLA AND THE GOLDEN BRA / GOLDILOCKS AND THE THREE BARES

1964/1962, Something Weird Video, DD-2.0/MA/+, \$24.95, 72m 6s/69m 7s, DVD-1

By John Charles

Over a decade before **THE FIRST NUDIE MUSICAL** (1976) spuriously claimed to be the original all-singing, all-dancing, all-naked extravaganza, these two nudie-cuties officially coined the form. Of course, one cannot expect too much from movies customarily peopled by performers who could barely even *talk* coherently, let alone sing, but these cheapies have undeniable

novelty value and a few surprises.

Leon Minardi's **SINDERELLA AND THE GOLDEN BRA** follows the fairytale's familiar outline, with "Derella" (Suzanne Sybele) forced to perform endless chores for her repulsive stepmother and two stepsisters. She is able to tolerate their abuses by daydreaming about what life would be like with dashing Prince David (Bill Gaskin). Granted one last chance by "The Universal League of Fairies" to show his prowess, Derella's drunken Fairy Godfather (**ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST**'s Sydney Lassick) provides the girl with the necessary accoutrements and she is the belle of the ball. Come midnight, all the prince has to identify her is the gaudy undergarment of the title. Naturally, a royal decree is quickly declared, ordering that all maidens in the kingdom drop their tops and try it on for size. When the evil stepmother will not let her participate in the fitting, Derella pleads for some additional help from above to fulfil her wish.

The songs are predictably tin-eared though, of course, it is more enjoyable to hear these rank amateurs massacre insipid lyrics than poetic ones. In addition to its aspirations, **SINDERELLA** also differs from the nudie-cutie norm via an inordinate amount of gay subtext that you just did not see in such early adults-only fare. With its gaudy period costumes, effeminate supporting cast, cross dressing fairy godfather, daffy knitting-obsessed king and preponderance of master shots, this bears an amusing resemblance to the penny dreadfuls Andy Milligan cranked out later in the decade. Even so, **SINDERELLA** is a veritable blockbuster by nudie-cutie standards and these unintentional (?) distractions make it more enjoyable than many other examples of the form.

Produced under the more fitting handle *SINGING IN THE SUN*, Herschell Gordon Lewis' **GOLDILOCKS AND THE THREE BARES** has no fairy tale hook at all, though it does pre-date **SINDERELLA** as the first of its type. Singer Eddie Livingston (Rex Marlow) puts the make on pretty publicist Allison Edwards (Allison Louise "Bunny" Downe) and finds his affections returned. However, Allison has a horrifying secret: she's a (*gasp*) nudist! Rex's buddy, nightclub comic Tommy Sweetwood (Bill Kerwin, billed under his character's name), follows the girl one day and learns of her secret passion. Will Rex spurn Allison because she spends her weekends wearing nothing but the wind?

Keeping true to their image as trash movie innovators, H.G. Lewis and Dave Friedman top the nude trampoline antics from **NATURE'S PLAYMATES** (also 1962) by incorporating *au natural* horseback riding (ouch) and suit-free yachting. Oh, yes, and *songs*, with "skin-diving singing sensation" Marlow warbling his way through some truly maladroit compositions. Adult theater owner/producer Tom Dowd decided that Lewis' attention needed to be fixed fully on the direction of his trailblazing \$30,000 epic, so a union man operated the camera this time. Consequently, the cinematography displays a basic competence almost always lacking from the director's other pictures, though a few shots are still not quite in focus. Boxer Joey Maxim also appears, along with HGL regulars Craig Maudslay, Jr. (**SCUM OF THE EARTH**) and Mal Arnold (**BLOOD FEAST**).

Thankfully, SWV has supplemented this motionless motion picture (in Buffocolor and Seemorescope!) with another commentary from Friedman, joined here by both Frank Henenlotter and Mike Vraney. The Mighty Monarch of the Exploitation Film World



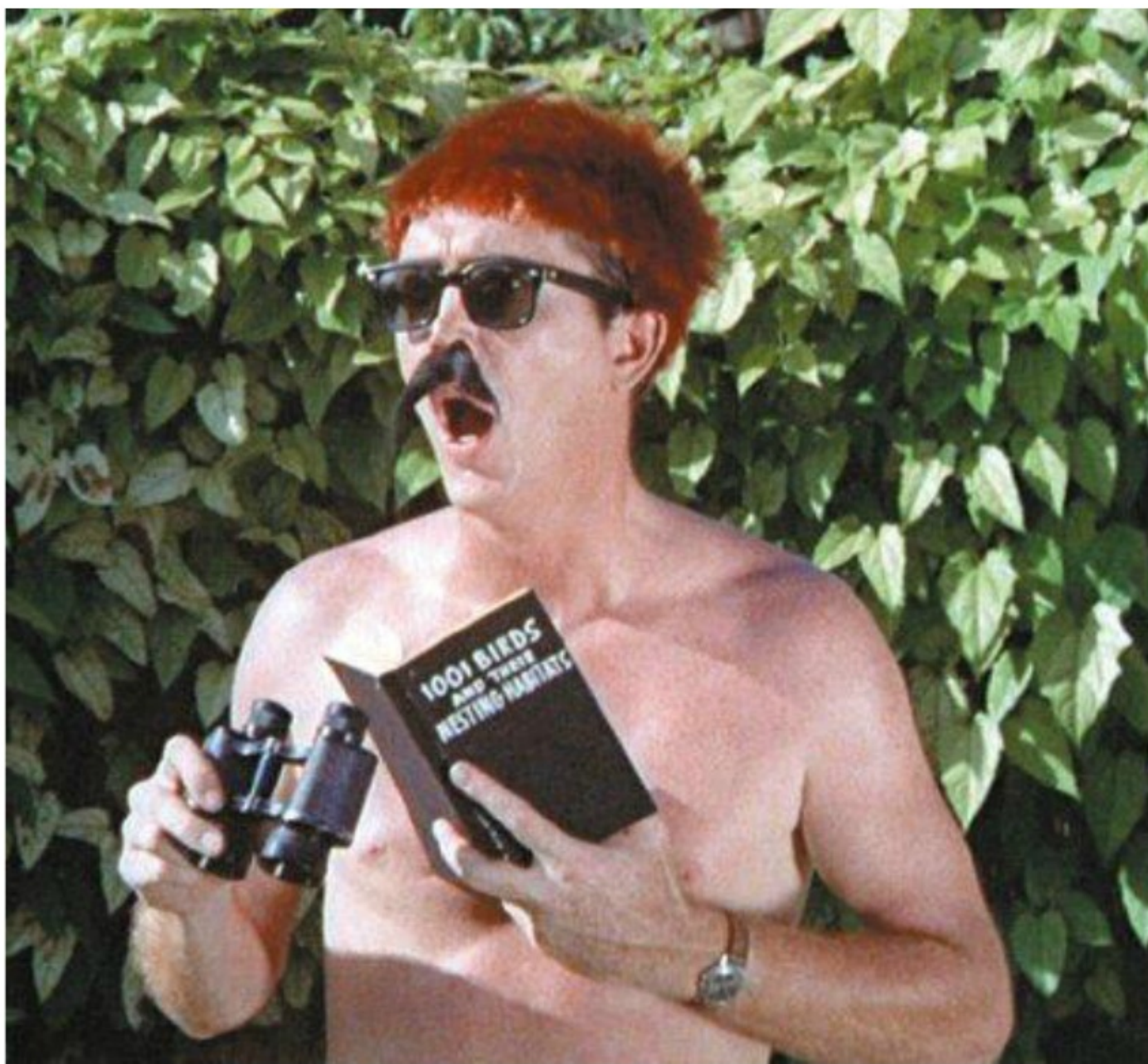
*Fairy godfather Sydney Lassick tries to make his charge the belle of the ball in the World's Second Nudie Musical, **SINDERELLA AND THE GOLDEN BRA**.*

reminisces about the circumstances that led to **GOLDILOCKS'** creation, the travails that he and Lewis went through trying to pull off Dowd's outlandish suggestions, and the agonies of dealing with the hapless Marlow (who, during his various numbers, insisted on holding the microphone with his right hand, even though his middle finger had been cut off in a lawnmower accident!). He also relates an amusing story about **SINDERELLA's** world premiere at (where else?) one of the Pussycat Theaters. It is yet another highly enjoyable and informative session; who needs the actual movie when you have Dave Friedman?

SINDERELLA suffers from green emulsion scratches and ample speckling, but colors are good and the sound is okay, save for some buzz and crackle during the more heavily damaged sections. **GOLDILOCKS** is pulled from the negative and looks very good but don't mind those little splices during the nude scenes:

they're not damage, just the editor knocking out (then) illegal glimpses of the cast's nether regions! The audio is a bit scratchy but good enough—and who would want these rotten songs to sound any better?

It wouldn't be a SWV double feature without an avalanche of extras and this release does not disappoint. In addition to trailers for **SINDERELLA** and **GOLDILOCKS** ("A cast of hundreds—mostly girls!") and several others (including the wonderfully titled **FRENCH WITHOUT DRESSING**), are the usual barrage of shorts. The highlights here are ecdysiast extraordinaire Lili St. Cyr in "Cinderella's Love Lesson" (not surprisingly, she loses more than just her gown at midnight) and "The Super Dreams," in which a janitor (who looks like a geriatric John Waters) imagines himself to be the head of a movie studio. Naturally, the short concentrates on the main perk of his job: auditioning the female talent (all of



*A would-be Mr. Teas (Bill Kerwin) gets an eyeful in the World's First Nudie Musical, **GOLDBLOCKS AND THE THREE BARES**.*

whom mysteriously need to be naked at the time). There is also a collection of covers for 1960s/early '70s sex movie magazines (with names like ART FILMS REVIEW and CINEMA KEYHOLE) set to a seriously psychedelic cue from Dwayne Avery's **BOOBY TRAP**. Left clicking on the Extras page reveals the trailer for **PINOCCHIO** (better known as **THE EROTIC ADVENTURES OF PINOCCHIO**) and it is a far preferable experience than sitting through that entire feature!

TARGETS

1968, Paramount Home Entertainment, DD-2.0/MA/16:9/LB/ST/+, 89m 59s, \$9.99, DVD-1
By Bill Cooke

It began as a challenge... Not about to waste two whole days in horror star Boris Karloff's contract, Roger Corman offered aspiring director Peter Bogdanovich the chance to make a film by dovetailing 20m of existing footage

from **THE TERROR** (1963) with two days' worth of new material featuring Karloff, plus an additional 40m of... well, whatever.

Then it became a joke... as Bogdanovich, agonizing over what to do, suggested the film start with the real Boris Karloff sitting in a screening of **THE TERROR** and turning to Corman to exclaim, "That is the worst movie I've seen in my life!"

Eventually it turned into TARGETS... the unorthodox thriller that established Bogdanovich as a major new talent, while offering Karloff's fading star a chance to blaze one more time before the final slew of Mexican horrors that capped his career.

The screenplay ingeniously juggles two parallel storylines: in the first, aging horror film star Byron Orlok (Karloff)—realizing that his brand of gothic melodrama has become embarrassingly old-fashioned in an increasingly cynical and violent society—announces his

retirement from the biz. As Orlok argues with his entourage on a busy Los Angeles sidewalk, the scene shifts to a view of the old man through a sniper's scope, and suddenly we're plunged into the second story, that of Bobby Thompson (Tim O'Kelley)—an all-American kid who seems perfectly normal on the outside, but for whatever reason goes nuts and starts randomly shooting people with his extensive gun collection. While Orlok suffers through a humiliating promotional tour along with a young but already bitter filmmaker (Peter Bogdanovich, who at one point laments, "All the good films have been made"), Bobby picks off highway motorists from the top of an oil tank and narrowly evades the police. The two storylines finally converge at the Raseda Drive-In, where a personal appearance by "reel" villain Orlok is upstaged by "real" monster Thompson, who opens fire on isolated audience members from his inconspicuous nest behind a flickering movie screen alight with blood-and-thunder images from **THE TERROR**.

Based on the true crime of Charles Whitman, a young man who shot and killed 16 people from the bell tower of the University of Texas in Austin, **TARGETS** is part of the 1960s psycho-thriller trend that was kick-started by Michael Powell's **PEEPING TOM** and Alfred Hitchcock's **PSYCHO** (both 1960). All three films feature introspective, boyish anti-heroes who are exposed to be murders. But while Hitchcock and Powell turn crime stories with no supernatural content into uncontested horror films through the use of gothic trappings—**PSYCHO** contains the ubiquitous spooky old house that may or may not be haunted, not to mention a real mummy in its cellar, while **PEEPING TOM**'s *mise-en-scène* of brick buildings



*Boris Karloff, master of the macabre, is on a collision course with modern day horror in Peter Bogdanovich's **TARGETS**.*

and dark alleyways is supplemented with strange color lighting and cleverly contemporized torture chamber iconography—Bogdanovich strives for a blander, starker realism (and to increase the feeling of verisimilitude, there is no music score). Bobby may live with his mother like Norman Bates did, but it's in a perfectly mundane, suburban home with carpeting, not some rotting Victorian mansion. And he might obsess unhealthily over a father's hobby just as **PEEPING TOM**'s Mark Lewis did, but guns are more everyday—and a lot less melodramatic—than the photographing and recording of ultimate fear. We eventually figure out what drove Norman Bates and Mark Lewis to commit murder; it's all part of the narrative puzzle. What makes **TARGETS** so chilling is that—other than a fleeting glimpse of a picture of the boy in a soldier's uniform and a feeling that he's trying to say something profound, though he lacks the ability to express it—we never

learn why Bobby Thompson shoots his pretty wife or his meek mother... how he can appear perfectly sane through the course of his rampage... and how he can show no remorse in the end ("I hardly ever missed," he brags to a police officer).

Paramount brings this important product of the Corman factory to DVD in an indispensable and inexpensive special edition that, aside from boasting a spotless widescreen transfer (letterboxed to a ratio of 1.78:1), features an amazingly thorough audio commentary by Peter Bogdanovich, whose memory of the day-to-day shooting of this 35 year-old film is sharper than most young directors discussing a brand new work. The director admits that of all the film genres, science fiction and horror are his least favorite: "So, of course, my first movie is a horror picture, and I never made another." He points out where he utilized tips from the master directors whom he had interviewed, including Alfred Hitchcock ("Never use

establishing shots to establish"), George Cukor (the opposing color schemes of the two storylines was inspired by Cukor's work on **A STAR IS BORN**), and Fritz Lang (the use of the zoom lens to imply a rushing bullet). He also reveals that an uncredited Samuel Fuller helped rewrite the final draft script in an afternoon, advising him to "Save your money for the finish, kid," while dictating the film's *tour de force* drive-in finale. And, of course, there are a number of great stories involving "Dear Boris" that are sure to warm the hearts of all his fans. Karloff was in a great deal of pain, but he never once complained, even as the low-budget production kept him working long hours into the night. He would refer to the lines as "the lyrics" or "the jokes," and was a little worried about Orlok deriding himself so much since the role was going to be construed as autobiographical by his public. Following the star's single-take reading of a Somerset

Maugham story for the late-night cameras, the crew broke out into spontaneous applause; and later, Karloff's wife Evie approached Bogdanovich to say, "Can you imagine how many years it's been since a crew *applauded* Boris?"

In addition to the commentary, there is a 13m taped introduction by Bogdanovich that repeats a lot of the stories from the commentary, but they're all so interesting you'll hardly care. Some great behind-the-scenes stills illustrate the talk. A portion of the film's theatrical trailer appears in the intro, but strangely isn't included as an isolated feature.

TARGETS was poised for a major studio release when the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy caused a sudden public outcry against violence in movies. The picture was too good not to release, but Paramount got cold feet and granted only a limited run, ensuring that Bogdanovich's "comment on the easy accessibility of guns in America" would die a quick death at the box

office. "Nothing much has changed since I made this movie almost 35 years ago," he says simply. "We thought this might have some kind of impact... but it didn't."

WINTER KILLS: SPECIAL EDITION

1979, Anchor Bay Entertainment, DD-1.0/MA/16:9/LB/ST/CC/+, 96m 18s, \$29.98, DVD-1

By Rebecca and Sam Umland

After a bizarre, troubled production history, fraught with many delays and the murder of one of its producers—a story worth telling in its own right—**WINTER KILLS** finally opened domestically in theaters in 1979. Soon after, this fictive account of the possible conspiracy behind the John F. Kennedy assassination was pulled from theaters because the parent company, Avco-Embassy, had several defense contracts, and found the material offensive. Efforts to reach audiences through a re-release of the film in 1983 also proved unsuccessful, at which time it was marketed as a black

comedy. Failing to reach its intended audience, **WINTER KILLS** vanished from theaters. It has been previously released on VHS by Embassy Home Entertainment, and was given a perfunctory laserdisc release many years ago, but we have not had the opportunity to screen these issues. Anchor Bay's two-disc DVD Special Edition is an attempt to establish the film's significance and to document its troubled history. In this latter regard, ABE's release succeeds admirably; whether the film is a neglected "masterpiece" is debatable. Most certainly, however, it reflects the post-Watergate pessimism of the era in which it was made.

Written and directed by William Richert, **WINTER KILLS** was based on the 1974 novel by Richard Condon, author of **THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE** and **PRIZZI'S HONOR**, both of which became popularly successful motion pictures. The film is the story of Nick Kegan (Jeff Bridges), whose enormously wealthy father, Pa Kegan (John Huston) bought the presidency for Nick's half-brother, Tim,

Jeff Bridges finds himself living in a far more sinister America after choosing to investigate the assassination of his brother—a US President—in WINTER KILLS.



many years earlier; the latter was assassinated in 1960. Through the efforts of a family employee, Keifitz (Richard Boone), Nick—who remains unsettled in a career and is thus assigned by his father to manage one of his ships—hears the death-bed confession of a dying man, Arthur Fletcher (Joe Spinell), who claims to have been a second gunman in the assassination. This information sends Nick on a convoluted, sometimes dangerous quest to uncover the truth of his brother's murder. The trail becomes labyrinthine: it leads Nick in turn to a deranged rival of his father, Z.K. Dawson (Sterling Hayden), to imprisoned Mafia leader Frank Mayo (Tomas Milian), even to the fascinatingly perverse Pa Kegan himself, brilliantly played by Huston, and the sinister John Cerruti (Anthony Perkins), Kegan's employee, whose subterranean super-computer keeps an attentive eye on the Kegan empire, which consists of oil, publishing houses, upscale restaurants and, as Pa Kegan himself utters, "twenty-seven hospitals in fifteen cities." To complicate matters, Nick's effort to woo an aspiring magazine editor, Yvette Malone (played by model Belinda Bauer in her feature film debut) fails when Nick discovers, in the film's paranoid world, that she, too, is not who she seems to be.

Writer/director Richert assembled a rather astonishing cast for his directorial debut. In addition to actors of such stature as Bridges, Boone, Huston, and Perkins, the film boasts bit parts by icons such as Dorothy Malone as Nick's mother, revered Japanese actor Toshiro Mifune as the Kegan family butler, Eli Wallach as Joe Diamond (the Jack Ruby figure), and even Elizabeth Taylor as a high-class prostitute and procurer for President Tim Kegan.

Other veterans include Brad Dexter (**THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN**) and Ralph Meeker (**KISS ME DEADLY**). The film was superbly shot by cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond, and Richert had a competent, dedicated crew, many of whom worked gratis when the film ran into financial straits, a testament to their conviction that **WINTER KILLS** was worth seeing through to completion.

Despite the plentitude of talent, though, the film falls short of its aspirations, but not because of its production troubles or because of the timing of its release. For despite the stellar performances and considerable humor, the film doesn't quite know what it wants to be. That it remains ill-defined is clear from its varied marketing strategies, from its belated debut in 1979 as a political thriller, to its 1983 re-release when it was billed as a black comedy, and finally the clever attempts to shroud the ill-fated history of the film itself in conspiracy theories, from mob financial backing, to the murder of co-producer Leonard J. Goldberg, to its abrupt disappearance from theaters—until the DVD era prompted its much-warranted resurrection. The film's troubled history is chronicled in a supplemental 38m documentary, **WHO KILLED WINTER KILLS?** Richert explains that at one point, after the production had been stalled for about two years, in order to raise funds to complete the picture, he wrote a comedy titled **THE AMERICAN SUCCESS COMPANY** (1979), filmed quickly in West Germany, that did well enough financially to allow him to complete **WINTER KILLS**. The series of hurdles the film had to overcome to reach closure is a story worth hearing, and the story is well-told by Jeff Bridges, Belinda Bauer, Richert, Vilmos Zsigmond, and veteran Hitchcock production designer Robert Boyle.

The supplements also include **STAR STORIES** (7m 39s), containing amusing anecdotes about the eccentricities of those involved, dished-out with great relish by the garrulous Richert, who prattles away with great ease on many subjects, including Liz Taylor's greed, Richard Boone's heavy drinking, and smoking dope with Sterling Hayden.

Still, **WINTER KILLS** lacks a clear sense of what it wants to be. For instance, it takes no time to figure out that the events are based on the Kennedy assassination, as parallels surface immediately, from the date and circumstances, to the close approximation of names. Nick blithely continues to plunge on into the labyrinth, following one tenuous lead after another, never questioning whether the death-bed confession he heard was in fact true: does the film endorse conspiracy theories, or is it a Kafkaesque parody of them? Given the number of alleged perpetrators, it's hard to believe that the conspiracy could have been kept quiet for so long. Indeed, once one notices the pattern that the characters Nick meets and interviews are being killed off, **WINTER KILLS** seems rather obviously indebted to Orson Welles' **CONFIDENTIAL REPORT** (aka **MR. ARKADIN**, 1955), a similarly failed and troubled venture. That film's Arkadin character (Welles) bears a more than superficial similarity to Pa Kegan, although **WINTER KILLS** is much more obviously Oedipal in its final showdown. (As if to underscore the Oedipal subtext, twice Pa Kegan offers to share his current mistresses with his son.) If the film wants to serve as a more serious commentary on conspiracy theories, or portray the chilling cover-up of a major political assassination, it would have benefitted from showing us at least a glimpse of the long-dead victim, Tim Kegan, in



BOUNCE KO GALS Yukiko Okamoto (left) and Yasue Sato try to earn back some stolen money in a Tokyo red light district.

order to either build our sympathies or add to our revulsion. The rather convoluted plot tends to exacerbate the viewer's inability to decide what **WINTER KILLS** wants to convey. We do not object to its sojourn into the surreal or absurd, but it is not immediately clear whether the film is serio-comic or just indecisively written.

In addition to an engaging audio commentary by Richert, other supplements consist of behind-the-scenes production stills, stills from deleted scenes, production designs, poster and advertising art, and, as part of the DVD-ROM materials, the original screenplay, which we were unable to access on our Macintosh G3. In short, Anchor Bay has given the film every opportunity to show its strengths, and given it a superb presentation. The anamorphic widescreen is excellent and the DD-1.0 soundtrack is clear and robust. English captions are included, as well as the original 3m 15s theatrical trailer.

Imports

BOUNCE KO GALS

aka **BOUNCE CALL GIRLS**
aka **BOUNCING YOUNG GIRLS**
1997, Infinity Entertainment
(South Korea), DD-5.1 & 2.0/
MA/16:9/LB/ST/+, \$29.99,
109m 10s, DVD-0
By John Charles

Strait-laced Japanese high school student Lisa (**RETURNER**'s Yukiko Okamoto) plans a trip to New York City to continue her studies and get a fresh start. Needing extra cash before departure, she goes to Tokyo's Shibuya district (on the wrong side of the tracks) to sell her used panties and school uniform to a sex shop. Then she gets together with three other girls her age for a "schoolgirl video" shoot, in which they prance around blowing bubbles and doing other innocuous things while completely clothed. When the place is invaded

by thugs, a young male admirer (**GEMINI**'s Jun Murakami) helps Lisa to escape but her money is stolen. Laku (**THE DIMENSION TRAVELERS**' Yasue Sato) and Jonco (**RING 1 & 2**'s Hitomi Sato), two very different girls who have a lot more experience at this sort of thing, offer to help Lisa make as much of her lost ¥3000 back as possible before her flight leaves the next day. However, Jonco's habit of robbing customers (usually by blasting them with a tazer gun before anything sexual can take place) comes back to haunt her, leading to a potentially lethal situation for all three girls.

Japanese pornography happily caters to just about every fetish imaginable, with school-girls apparently being one of that country's paramount fixations. Indeed, the synopsis above could easily be for any number of adult videos, but writer/director Masato Harada (**INUGAMI**) is not interested in exploitation (there is no nudity on display, let alone prurient activities). By the same token,

no moral judgments are passed on these “ko gals.” Harada does, however, have much to say about the men who solicit them, as well as a male-dominated society that subtly coerces some women to act as sex toys in order to make a living. After a time, one almost sympathizes with Junco’s view that the *hentai* (perverts) deserve what they get if they’re foolish enough to pick her up. However, the reality of the situation is brought home by a vignette in which a businessman beats one girl almost to death but is let go by police because *she* approached *him* first. With such a system and “role models” as these, it is easy to believe how girls so young could end up casually tossing about mature topics like abortion and diet pills, and performing adult acts for individuals old enough to be their parents but seemingly far less grown up. Junco is threatened one evening by a Yakuza (**CURE**’s Koji Yakusho), who feels that these teens are hurting his club’s business by charging far less than his stable of “professionals.” In spite of this, Harada presents him as a principled and ultimately sympathetic human being we come to respect, like Junco and Laku. The director elicits very natural and appealing performances from all three actresses, whose characters are distinct and interesting enough for true chemistry to form. Outsider Lisa is polite, principled, and shuns materialism; Junco is jaded and street-smart enough to survive adversity; and the slightly scatterbrained Laku (who, among other things, has a serious phobia about being parallel with straight lines) is too full of life to be dampened by its downsides. The events leading up to the finale are a bit too pat, but the closing minutes are surprisingly affecting, thanks to the warmth

these performers have engendered. It would be so easy for any film on such a topic to be nothing more than heavy-handed and obvious; Harada’s defies the usual strictures of social commentary by managing to be pointed and, wonderfully enough, also quite life-affirming.

Presented in anamorphic 1.83:1, the image is slightly soft and blacks are light but colors are warm and attractive. However, the upper matte is a bit too high during one reel, with a white line often present just below it. The splice is also apparent at some shot change points. The 5.1 track is marred by occasional reverb but remains serviceable; the original 2.0 mix is also included. The film is presented with its original Japanese track, and optional English, Korean, and Japanese subtitles; the English edition is mediocre (names are presented with unnecessary quotation marks and the spelling of the characters’ names differ from the usual Romanizations). The gist of conversations is adequately conveyed, though there is a lot of overlapping dialogue that would still be lost even with the best of translations. A number of supplementary features are on offer but, alas, only Korean and Japanese speakers will find them accessible: the original Japanese trailer, a TV spot (which is more like a brief promo than a commercial), director and cast profiles, interviews with Harada and several cast members, and a 20m 54s “Making of...” Like many Korean DVDs, the clear keep case comes packaged in an attractive outer sleeve featuring slightly different art. There is also an insert featuring a short Harada interview and more cast info in Korean. Available from Poker Industries (see Imports).

LEGACY OF DRACULA: THE BLOODTHIRSTY DOLL

Yureiyashiki no Kyofu:

Chi O Suu Ningyoo

“Fear of the Ghost House: Bloodsucking Doll”

aka **THE VAMPIRE DOLL**

1970, Shadow Warrior/Artsmagic, DD-2.0/LB/ST/+, 71m 1s, £19.99, DVD-2

LAKE OF DRACULA

Noroi no yakata: Chi o sū me

1971, Shadow Warrior/Artsmagic, DD-2.0/LB/ST/+, 81m 34s, £19.99, DVD-2

EVIL OF DRACULA

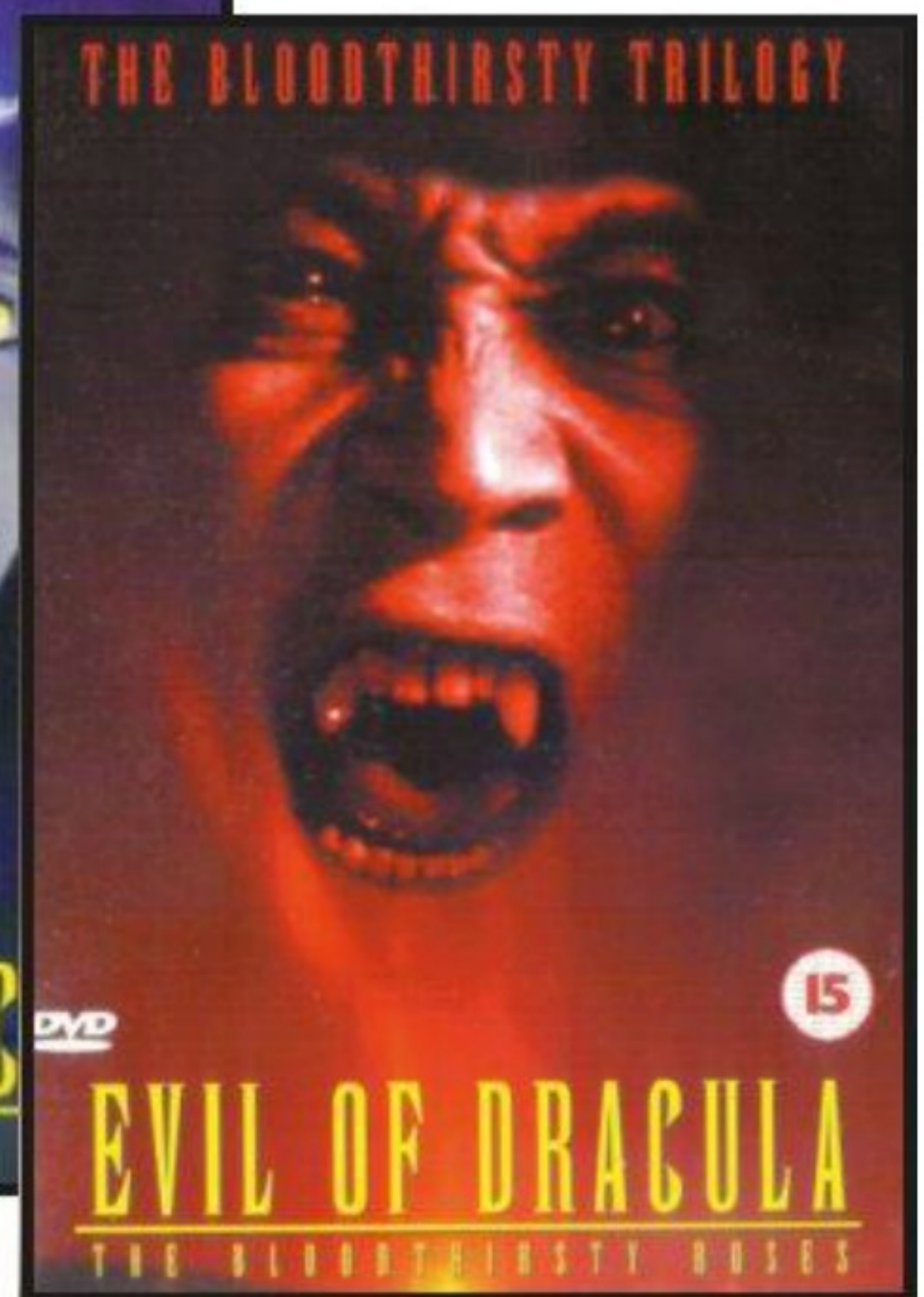
Chi o suu bara

“The Bloodthirsty Rose”

1974, Shadow Warrior/Artsmagic, DD-2.0/LB/ST/+, 82m 44s, £19.99, DVD-2

By Tim Lucas

Three vampire films produced by Toho in the early 1970s have been separately released on DVD in the UK under the shared umbrella rubric “The Bloodthirsty Trilogy.” Though the films don’t tell a sequential story, the trilogy was in its entirety directed by Michio Yamamoto (Kurosawa’s assistant director on **THRONE OF BLOOD**, 1957) and scripted by Ei Ogawa (with others), whose name recalls the great pseudonymous Japanese horror author Edogawa Rampo. Never widely distributed in the West (in America, there were two badly-dubbed exceptions: a minor theatrical release of **LAKE OF DRACULA** by UPA, and an edited-for-TV Paramount Home Entertainment release of **EVIL OF DRACULA** on VHS, now OOP), the trilogy is most familiar to English-speaking fans from some striking still photos which have reached print, rather than from actual viewings; the first film in the series has developed a



reputation over the years as one of the most difficult titles from Toho's classic period to see. Therefore, the availability of the entire trilogy on DVD—in wide-screen and in their native language, with (removable) English subtitles—is exciting news. While the discs do not quite meet expectations, they do at least provide an opportunity to properly assess the trilogy in toto.

The first in the series, **LEGACY OF DRACULA: THE BLOODTHIRSTY DOLL**, is the ringer of the trilogy; it has vampiric aspects but resists reaching all the way to the Balkans for its supernatural mythos; it unreels like a delicate mutant fusion of classical Japanese ghost stories and the Mexican folklore involving *la Llorona* ("The Crying Woman"). Abroad for six months, Kazuhiko Sagawa (Atsuo Nakamura) drives to the remote estate of fiancée Yuko (Yukiko Kobayashi), only to discover that she died two weeks earlier in a car accident. When Kazuhiko fails to return home,

sister Keiko (Kayo Matsuo) and a friend (Akira Nakao) trace his footsteps to the dead girl's home. Between Yuko's disconcertingly placid mother (Yoko Minazake), her disfigured razor-toothed manservant Genzo, and unexplained weeping sounds heard after nightfall, something is obviously awry. What they discover smiling from the shadows is a restless spirit thirsting for warm blood, but "It's not Yuko—her troubled spirit remains here."

Not nearly as good as its rarity encourages one to hope, or its packaging suggests, **LEGACY OF DRACULA** is basically a run-of-the-mill haunted house offering with all the familiar locations and scenes—the secluded old house, the midnight investigations of a noise, the fake scares as people rifle through closets—and only a few, all-too-brief flares of poetical horror to make its fairly stingy running time worthwhile. With her night black hair, milky moonlight-blue skin and

transfixing stare, Kobayashi's weeping vampire is visually arresting, but too subtly employed; she is a light *frisson* rather than a serious chill. On the plus side, the final explanation of events is unexpected and creepy, pointing away from the supernatural trappings of 1960s horror toward the more realistic, violent, invasive bent of 1970s shock cinema. The film is given 10 chapter marks on disc, and since all three discs are comparable in presentation, the technical details will be discussed collectively below.

The next entry, **LAKE OF DRACULA**, is bolder in technique and more blatantly derivative of the Hammer Dracula cycle, containing scenes and sequences not only influenced by **HORROR OF DRACULA** (1958), **BRIDES OF DRACULA** (1960) and **DRACULA HAS RISEN FROM THE GRAVE** (1968), but slavishly imitative of them. Midori Fujita



The undead Yuko (Yukiko Kobayashi) wields a very material weapon in LEGACY OF DRACULA: THE BLOODTHIRSTY DOLL.

stars as Akiko, an art teacher residing in a cottage near Lake Fujimi with her sister Natsuko (Sanae Emi). Akiko is haunted by the memory of a childhood dream in which she chased her runaway dog to a secluded old house inhabited by blue-faced demons with bloody mouths and golden eyes; the imagery of that dream informs the art she creates as an adult. After a crate containing an ornate coffin is delivered to a neighboring house, Akiko's world begins to disintegrate: her dog is found dead, a trusted handyman (**LEGACY**'s "Genzo" actor) tries to rape her, and Natsuko begins acting strangely (she has been bitten by a vampire in a scene modelled after the assassination of Christopher Lee and Barbara Ewing in **DRACULA HAS RISEN...**, right down to the lullaby-like musical accompaniment). With the help of her doctor boyfriend Saeki (Osahide Takahashi), Akiko soon realizes that her childhood "dream" was actually a suppressed memory of something that really happened—and is about to happen again.

Far more sensuous and effective than its predecessor, **LAKE OF DRACULA** isn't entirely imitative; its great distinction is the glossily macabre cinematography of Rokuro Nishigaki, rich in lagoonish greens, milky whites and moonlight blues; production design (by **ATTACK OF THE MUSHROOM PEOPLE**'s Juichi Ikuno) which nicely approximates the stateliness of Hammer; and the screenplay's serious attempt to grapple with the relationships between art and mental disturbance, horror and beauty. Mori Kishida plays Dracula, or rather his descendent, with an authority that occasionally approaches that of Lee, and like his template, he dominates the film—set in the contemporary world one year before Hammer followed suit—despite minimal appearances. Surprisingly, before restaging **HORROR OF DRACULA**'s final disintegration scene by way of a **DRACULA HAS RISEN...**-style stumble that impales the vampire accidentally rather than through the exacting resourcefulness of its hero, the

denouement inverts the relationship of Baroness and young Baron Meinster in **BRIDES OF DRACULA** by referring to the vampire's imprisonment in a home where he could feed only on his father (an interesting homoerotic twist), and throws in a last-minute nod to Andrée Melly's resurrection in that film, courtesy of the terrific Sanae Emi. Sixteen chapters are provided for this title.

EVIL OF DRACULA (subtitled **THE BLOODTHIRSTY ROSE** onscreen) proves that Hammer's "Karnstein Trilogy" of **THE VAMPIRE LOVERS** (1970), **LUST FOR A VAMPIRE** (1971) and **TWINS OF EVIL** (1972) did not pass unnoticed by Ogawa and Yamamoto; this film could have been more commercially titled **DRACULA'S SCHOOL FOR GIRLS**. Shiraki (Toshio Kurosawa), a psychology professor, arrives at his new teaching post at the Keimei School, where the all-girl student body is upset over the recent death of the principal's wife and the disappearance of Keiko, one of their peers. The principal (Mori



Mori Kishida as a descendant of the Lord of the Undead in LAKE OF DRACULA.

Kishida, whose top-of-the-staircase introduction erases *any* doubt that he is reprising his Dracula role) confesses a personal illness to Shiraki, whom he sees as his predecessor, and that night, Shiraki has a close encounter with two vampire women—later identified as the dead wife (Miku Katsuragi) and the missing student—in a dormitory room furnished with white roses. Vampirism begins to spread through the school, turning the white roses mysteriously red, until Shiraki is left with only infatuated student Kumi (Mariko Mochizuki) to assist him in waging war against the undead. But when the bride of Dracula masquerades as Kumi's best friend Yukiko (Oota Mio), wearing the dead girl's own face, will she find the innocent girl with her defenses down?

Though arguably the series' highpoint, **EVIL OF DRACULA** finds Kishida overacting shamelessly (he growls so much, it's a miracle phlegm isn't flying all over the place); at the same time, Yamamoto moves well beyond

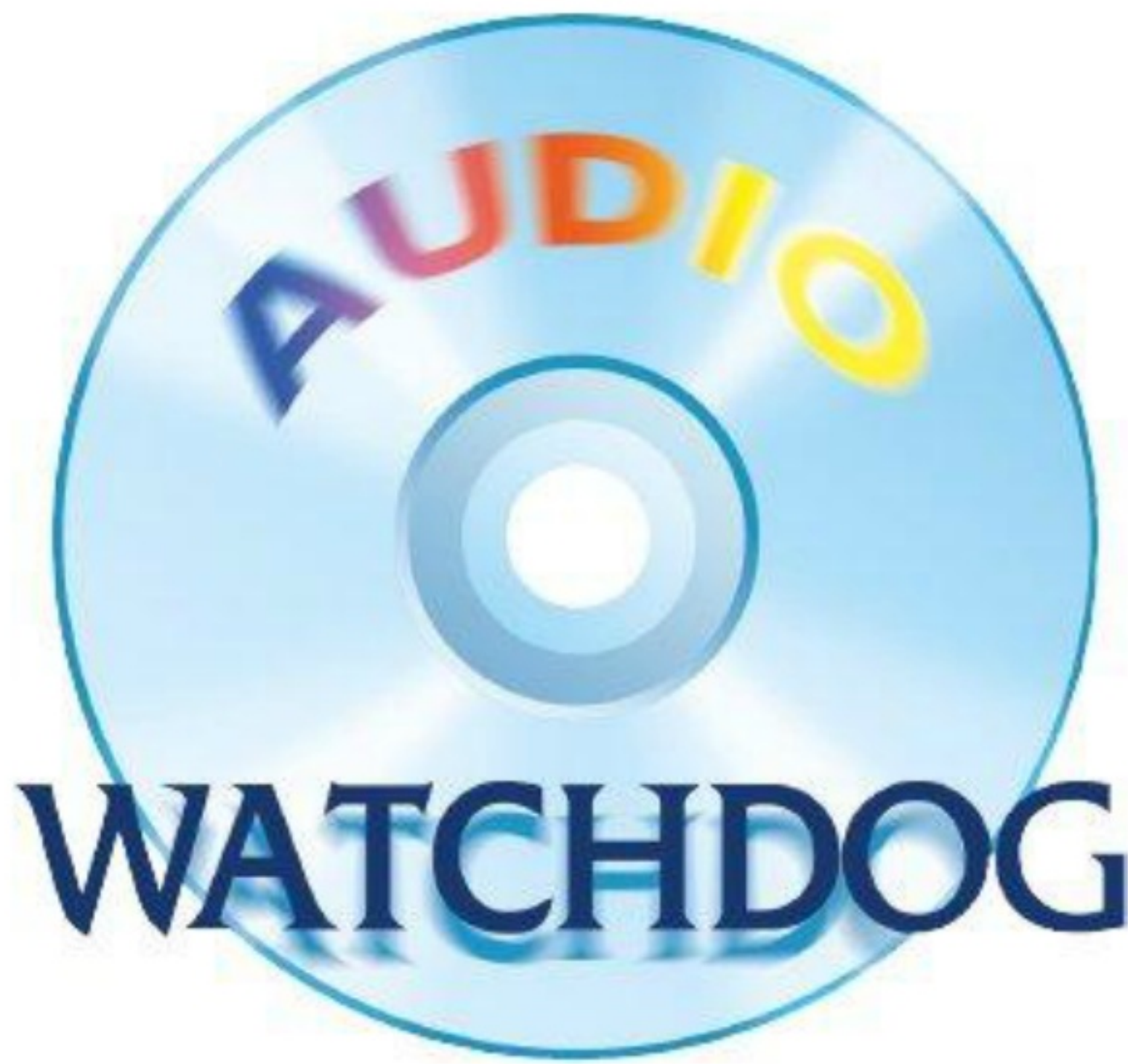
imitation into a confident mastery of the form, creating some horror set-pieces more accomplished than anything in Hammer's "Karnstein" films. At times he toys knowingly with our memories of the previous film, and the expectations fostered by that awareness, and the vampire scenes are startling in ways that will have you pausing to replay shots before moving on, its surging vampire women showing the influence of **COUNT YORGA, VAMPIRE** (1970). Its macabre mood is crystallized in the form of a supporting character, Yoshii (Katsuhiko Sasaki), another teacher who ogles the girls, walks around quoting Baudelaire poems in a state of obsessive distraction, and is finally revealed as one of Dracula's minions, having sold his soul to get his hands on one of the girl students. The series also edges here into more graphic territory, with some glimpses of nudity, and a rare scene that manages to be bloody and subtle at the same time—the vampire bride's removal of

Yukiko's face, accomplished during a cutaway to the girl's anguished hand and arm as they are freckled by the blood spraying from her punctured carotid artery.

Hearing that these films are available on DVD raises one's hopes for a quality presentation, but alas, in all three cases, the letterboxed scope transfers are undetailed (clearly not from a negative source), dark and grainy (only slightly better than VCD quality), and worst of all, not anamorphically enhanced. **EVIL OF DRACULA** fares slightly better than the other two, but all three look artifacty even in standard playback; when zoomed on a widescreen set, the movies occasionally look like they are being projected onto a thatched screen, and the removable English subtitles are sometimes cropped offscreen, even if the screen's vertical center has been raised. The subtitles are stilted and imprecise, with those for **EVIL OF DRACULA** faring worst; here, the hero is variously referred to as "Shirakei" and "Shiraki" and the school is called both "Seimei" and "Keimei," while one subtitle is vertically cropped on both sides of the screen. Extras include a few B&W stills, a "portrait gallery" (frame grabs), a Toho export pressbook, a short bio sketch of Mori Kishida, and promotional trailers for Shadow Warrior's "Zatoichi" and "Lone Wolf and Cub" releases.

While these releases are far from definitive, they do the job of making Western horror buffs more aware of this overlooked series, and buyers with standard television screen playback may find them somewhat more serviceable than we did. Available from Xploited Cinema (see Sources), priced at \$29.95 per title.





By Douglas E. Winter

Enter the Ambient

The “digital revolution” sweeping the motion picture industry has included striking advances in sound—from Dolby technologies to DTS to Sony’s SDDS—while also reinventing the essential relationship between music and film. With increasing influence, a school of musicians has posited a future in which music and sound are inseparable (or, at the least, interactive), and the conventional notion of a soundtrack—music as a layer of cinematic expression and experience—is transcended by a soundscape that integrates the aural (music, sound, effects, dialogue) and the visual. Its proponents—tomandandy, Asche & Spencer, Clint Mansell, among others—have emerged from the realms of rock music and advertising; and although German electronica wizards Tangerine Dream were their forefathers, their singular inspiration is Brian Eno.

Eno was an original member of Roxy Music, the artsy but innovative group founded in 1970 by vocalist Bryan Ferry. Although lacking in technical chops, Eno had an uncanny ear and was among the first performers to use synthesizers as sound generators rather than as conventional keyboards. He departed Roxy Music in 1973 after the band’s first two albums topped the UK charts—“Two non-musicians in a band is one too many,” Ferry reportedly said—and pursued

an eclectic career as a musician and producer for David Bowie, U2 and Talking Heads.

While collaborating with King Crimson’s Robert Fripp on two visionary assemblies of looped electronics—NO PUSSYFOOTING (1973) and EVENING STAR (1975)—Eno secured pop stardom as a solo artist with HERE COME THE WARM JETS and TAKING TIGER MOUNTAIN (BY STRATEGY) (both 1974), ANOTHER GREEN WORLD (1975) and BEFORE AND AFTER SCIENCE (1977). These recordings allowed Eno to finance his own label and take a stance as a conceptual artist with the minimalist meditations of DISCREET MUSIC (1975). Influenced most notably by Fripp and Erik Satie, he sought to demolish conventional distinctions between “music” and “sound” in favor of what he deemed the “ambient,” using processed pianos and electronics (and later, third-world instruments) to create tonal but not necessarily melodic atmospheres. This “ambient” music was meant to become part of the listener’s environment—background, coloration, painting, wallpaper, rather than something listened to with focus or concentration, as one would do at a concert or even while driving in a car.

Eno’s pervasive impact on contemporary music—in rock, classical, and film contexts—came through a series of decidedly *avant garde* (and, at the time, quietly received) releases. AMBIENT ONE: MUSIC FOR AIRPORTS (1979) was conceived for play over airport sound systems to soothe travelers, and MY LIFE IN THE BUSH OF GHOSTS (1981, with David Byrne) was a precursor of the now-common practice of sampling; but with MUSIC FOR FILMS (1978), APOLLO: ATMOSPHERES & SOUNDTRACKS (1983), and MUSIC FOR FILMS III (1988), which offered scores for mostly imaginary films, Eno revealed that his “musical painting” was perfect for the celluloid canvas. Today his art is known as sound design, a province once reserved for sound effects specialists but which now embraces the ambient, whether in miming the sound of a silent room or “juicing” high-octane action sequences with subliminal synths.

In the world of rock/pop, Eno’s music found its zenith—ironically, but perhaps inevitably—in a project to which he contributed only customized sounds: the essential album SLEEPS WITH THE FISHES (1987) by Pieter Nooten (sometime keyboardist for Clan of Xymox) with Michael Brook. Guitarist Brook, who had collaborated with Eno on HYBRID (1985) and other projects, later found his own success as a film composer in **HEAT** (1995), **ALBINO ALLIGATOR**

(1996), and **AFFLICTION** (1997), and played in Hans Zimmer's scoring ensemble for **BLACK HAWK DOWN** (2001). An entire subgenre of house music was soon deemed "ambient" when Aphex Twin and The Orb, inspired by Eno, exiled traditional dance rhythms to the background in favor of layered loops and waves of sounds and samples.

Eno's forays into feature film have been few but memorable: the "Prophecy Theme" for David Lynch's **DUNE** (1984) and "From the Beginning" for Dario Argento's **OPERA** (1987, for which he also produced two cues by his brother, composer/pianist Roger Eno). His first screen credit as a composer was the obscure Greek horror film **LAND OF THE MINOTAUR** (1976), starring Peter Cushing. More often, directors have adapted existing Eno songs to their films, as in **SE7EN** (whose credits run to David Bowie's "The Heart's Filthy Lesson" from the Eno-produced album **OUTSIDER**), **TRAINSPOTTING** ("Deep Blue Day") and **TRAFFIC** ("An Ending (Ascent)").

It was in **TRAFFIC** (2000) that Eno's sonic influences on film converged. Elaborate sound effects and foley were integrated seamlessly with shot-on-video source sounds—and the music of Cliff Martinez, former drummer for The Red Hot Chili Peppers (and in recordings with Captain Beefheart, Lydia Lunch, and The Dickies), who is arguably today's leading ambient soundtrack composer. After leaving the Chili Peppers for a solo career in 1986, Martinez took his first major film assignment on **SEX, LIES, AND VIDEOTAPE** (1989), and promptly became director Steven Soderbergh's composer of choice, scoring **KAFKA** (1991), **KING OF THE HILL** (1993), **THE UNDERNEATH** (1995), **SCHIZOPOLIS** (1997), **THE LIMEY** (1999) and **TRAFFIC**.

TRAFFIC was a critical and popular revelation: Martinez channeled Eno's abhorrence of foreground into a masterpiece of subtlety that moved the viewer by simple elegance rather than by the in-your-ear, this-is-what-you-should-feel thematics of a John Williams or James Horner. But this powerful score has been trumped by Martinez in his music for Joe Carnahan's **NARC** (2002; TVT Soundtrax TV-6670-2, \$18.99, 18 tracks, 42m 24s) and Soderbergh's **SOLARIS** (2002; Superb/Trauma TRM-74070-2 \$18.99, 11 tracks, 43m 30s).

*The father of the
ambient soundtrack
movement: Brian Eno.*





In **NARC**, Martinez' droning electronics are revved by percussion interludes that form an undeniable part of Carnahan's visuals. (The movie and the CD conclude with "Provoked" by Baby Namboos, which, like too many end titles these days, sounds like Björk but isn't.) **SOLARIS** finds Martinez following his director's lead and riffing on Stanley Kubrick's **2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY**, reinventing its modernist classical passages to create Martinez' most sophisticated and best score to date. Given the ambient construction of the music, each score, like that for **TRAFFIC**, demands and survives endless listening on its own. For more information on these discs, visit tvtrekrecords.com and superbrecords.com.

It's not surprising that Eno's "Ending (An Ascent)" also appears on the soundtrack of Danny Boyle's **28 DAYS LATER...** (XL Recordings XLCD168, \$17.99, 58m 54s), which confirms the futurist role of Eno and Robert Fripp in championing instrumental rock music as art. The pre-eminent "post-rock" bands—Radiohead, Sigur Ros, and God Speed! You Black Emperor—are conceived in the Fripp/Eno model of self-contained art ensembles whose music, unlike that of most other performing rock bands, engages their audience in a conceptual, rather than a purely physical, experience.

Although **28 DAYS LATER...** was scored by John Murphy—composer for **LOCK, STOCK, AND TWO SMOKING BARRELS** and **SNATCH**—informed listeners will note the music's striking similarity to that of God Speed! You Black Emperor, whose albums are must-haves of the



"post-rock" movement. One suspects that director Boyle used the music of GS!YBE as temp tracks, and that Murphy mimed the sound to fulfill Boyle's wishes—a suspicion underscored by the fact that the film's one song track sounds very much like a stand-in for The Flaming Lips. **28 DAYS LATER...** actually uses one GS!YBE instrumental, "East Hastings," to devastating effect; but that track, taken from the album **F#A#∞**, does not appear on the soundtrack CD. The film's three liturgical cues are featured on the disc—the familiar "In Paradisum" from Faure's "Requiem" and performances of "Abide with Me" and "Ave Maria" with apocalyptic ennuï by Perri Alleyne of the Liverpool quartet The Sense of Sound.

Collectors take note: The American edition of the **28 DAYS LATER...** soundtrack has been issued in a handsome digipak with an eight-page foldout comic book and two bonus tracks—remixes of "Season Song" and "Taxi (Ave Maria)"—that are not available on the EU release. The enhanced CD also includes a trailer from the film, a deleted "outtake," and a slideshow of digitized on-set Polaroids. For more information, rage on over to dnafilms.com or xlrecordings.com.

The Audio Watchdog may be contacted on line at OnEyeDog@aol.com. Review and promotional materials should be sent c/o Vale House, 2495 Oakton Hills Drive, Oakton VA 22124.



The Immortal Count

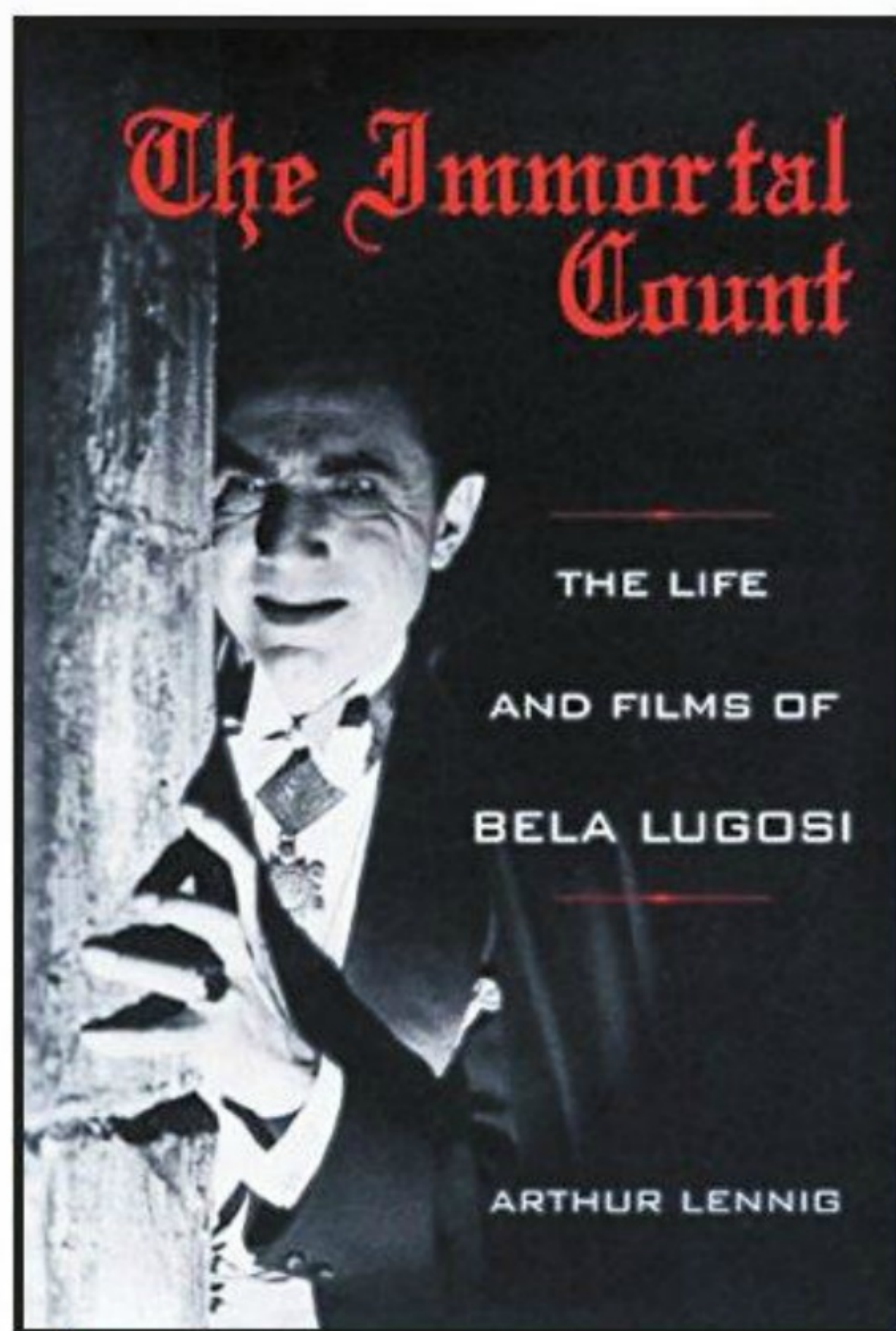
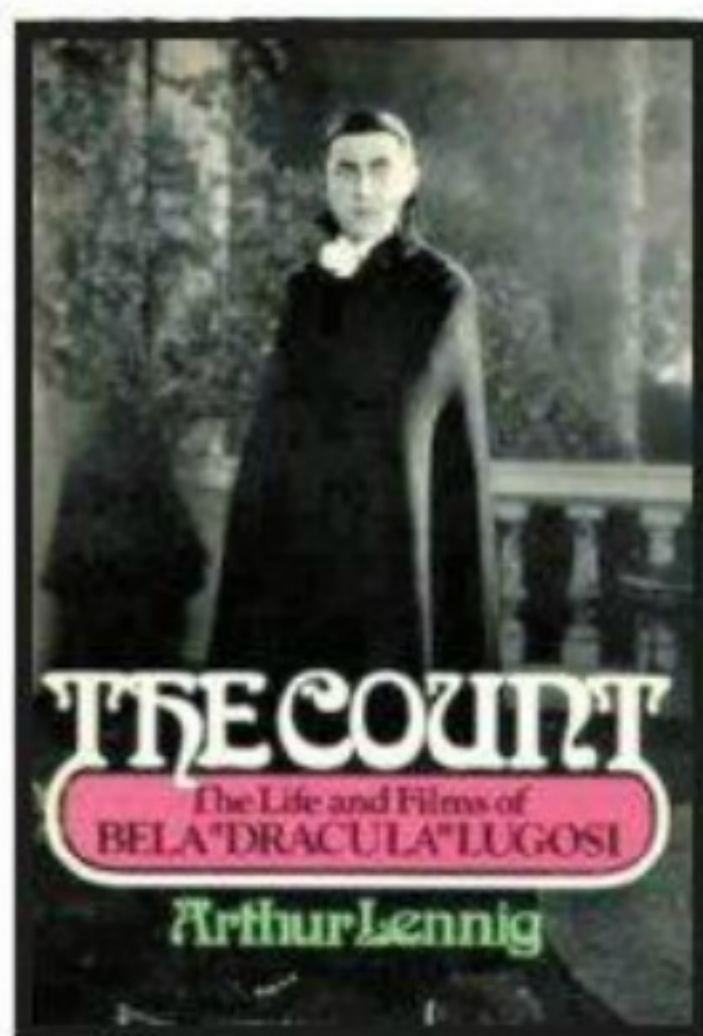
THE LIFE AND FILMS OF BELA LUGOSI

By Arthur Lennig

2003, The University Press of Kentucky,
663 S. Limestone St., Lexington KY 40508-4008,
548 pp., \$39.95 (hard cover).

Reviewed by Anthony Ambrogio

THE IMMORTAL COUNT is Arthur Lennig's revised and updated version of his seminal biography of Bela Lugosi, *THE COUNT* (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1974). Numerous articles on Lugosi and several book-length studies (eg., Robert Cremer's *THE MAN BEHIND THE CAPE*, 1976; Gregory William Mank's *KARLOFF AND LUGOSI*, 1990; Gary Don Rhodes' *LUGOSI*, 1997) have appeared in the interim, and Lennig himself has acquired previously unpublished information from first-hand sources (Richard Sheffield, who as a teenager knew Lugosi in his last years; Charles Heard, who befriended Hope Lininger Lugosi, Bela's fifth and final wife, in her last years), so he takes this opportunity to acknowledge and incorporate others' work, flesh out the revised text with his new research, and—thanks to VHS and DVDs—offer more detailed analyses of Lugosi's films. Typical is his discussion of *THE BLACK SLEEP* (1956): armed with further data supplied from various sources (Tom Weaver interviews, Forrest J Ackerman articles, Richard Sheffield e-mails), Lennig turns his original single paragraph (TC, pp. 312-313) into three-and-a-half pages (TIC, pp. 437-441), ending with a defense of Lugosi's portrayal ("Lugosi did all he could with his mute role").



Readers less enamored of Lugosi might complain that Lennig uses the additional pages to laud every Lugosi performance, no matter how objectively bad, but Lennig admits his Beladolatry up front. When, as an 11-year-old, Lennig saw *DRACULA* (1931), Lugosi "fascinated" him. "My admiration of Lugosi grew to adoration after seeing *WHITE ZOMBIE* and *THE RAVEN*" (TIC, p. vii). No wonder the man can do no wrong in Lennig's eyes; he's blinded by love. He does concede that Lugosi has sometimes been colorless and more often over-colorful, but he attributes the faults to script or (lack of) direction and endorses Lugosi's overacting as the only strength in otherwise dull productions. (See, for example, his comments on

THE RETURN OF CHANDU [1934; TIC, p. 211] for an instance of the former, and his reflections on Lugosi's 1947 theatrical revival of **DRACULA** [TIC, p. 352] for an instance of the latter.)

Lennig takes the opportunity to correct information that he took at face value in TC, such as what "Lugosi's friend and agent" Don Marlowe told him about how Marlowe's begging and pleading got Lugosi cast as Dracula in 1948's **ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET FRANKENSTEIN** (see TC, pp. 282-284). In TIC, Lennig tells us "certain facts indicate that this story might not be entirely true" (p. 358) and explains where the "friendly but inept" (p. 355) Marlowe exaggerated.

About Carol Borland, who played with Lugosi in **MARK OF THE VAMPIRE** (1935) and whom Lennig interviewed in November 1973, Lennig originally said, "An intelligent and lively girl, at sixteen she was already going to the university" (TC, p. 175). This becomes "An intelligent girl, she also had a lively imagination, which makes the veracity of her recollections doubtful" (TIC, p. 218). Lennig, subsequently able to verify various statements, learned that "Carol, who was born in February 1914, was—at least through June 1931—still in high school" (TIC, p. 218), that, contrary to her claim, "there is no record that she ever played on stage with Lugosi" (TIC, p. 510, n. 68), nor that she saw him lying in state. To this passage, "'It was strange,' Carol Borland told this writer, 'for I have seen Bela lying in his coffin so often that it was a familiar sight'" (TC, p. 317), Lennig adds, "That could have been true, but here she seems to have been exercising her novelistic gifts, for she wasn't at the funeral!" (TIC, p. 449).

In **THE IMMORTAL COUNT**, Lennig finds Gregory William Mank invaluable but faults him for fancifully reconstructing an on-set incident during **THE BLACK CAT** (1934), wherein Lugosi muffed a line and they had to keep retaking his flaying-Karloff-alive scene: "Mank shamelessly colors this event with his fictional additions. Without providing a direct source, he writes that Lugosi, 'thrilled at skinning his top-billed, tea-break nemesis'... With editorial comments like 'smiled politely,' 'ranted,' and 'battling his emotions,' Mank transforms a simple flub into a psychologically significant event that makes Karloff seem patiently tolerant and Lugosi utterly inept" (TIC, pp. 206-207).

But Lennig himself indulges in comparable reconstruction. Take, for example, his comments about the role-switching that occurred in **BLACK FRIDAY** (1940). In 1974, Lennig knew that Lugosi was initially meant to play Dr. Sovac and Karloff

the Jekyll/Hyde-like Professor Huxley/criminal Red Cannon, but "for some strange and foolish reason, the casting was drastically changed so that the roles that were created for both stars were shifted" (TC, p. 231): Karloff became Sovac, Stanley Ridges Huxley/Cannon, and Lugosi was relegated to second-banana gangster. Discovering that "strange and foolish reason," based on (not always reliable) **BLACK FRIDAY** scripter Curt Siodmak's remarks to Gregory Mank, Lennig now says, "Reputedly Karloff did not want to tackle the dual portrayal [and thus took the scientist role]" (TIC, p. 279). Since Karloff acquitted himself well as good/bad twins in **THE BLACK ROOM** (1935), Lennig posits, "Could it be possible that Karloff rejected the role of the professor/gangster not because he was afraid to play it, but because doing so would prevent Lugosi as the doctor from committing acting theft again, as Bela had done as Dr. Vollin in **THE RAVEN**, and as Ygor?" (TIC, p. 279). In fairness to Lennig, he always casts his surmises in speculative terms. But the results of Lennig's speculations are the same as Mank's assertions: to leave the reader with the writer's interpretation of the events.

By default, Karloff emerges as a villain in the book. It's almost axiomatic for adherents of one Terror Titan to trash the other. Lennig recognizes the futility of such behavior but can't help it: "Although there is no point in denigrating one actor in favor of the other... still, even a dispassionate observer can look askance at some of the unequal treatment allotted to Lugosi and Karloff" (TIC, p. 409). Karloff appears to be the more magnanimous, but that's because he could afford to be, Lennig says—at least twice. In two places, he mentions Karloff's "Poor Bela" epithet and says "It is far easier to be gracious when you have won over a rival than if you have lost out to him" (TIC, p. 206) and again "he [Karloff] could afford to be gracious, for after all he had bested Lugosi in every way" (TIC, p. 409).

Maybe this sentiment bears reiteration, but it illustrates a flaw in **THE IMMORTAL COUNT**. In expanding **THE COUNT**, Lennig apparently couldn't decide where to move or add certain passages and ended up repeating himself. For example, compare these statements: "In this period he was at the top of his form. He still had his looks, his health, and his notoriety. Although he had already made serious mistakes in the management of his stardom, his services were still in demand" (TIC, p. 181). "At this time Bela's services were still in demand... he certainly appreciated the rewards of his profession and was at the top of his form.

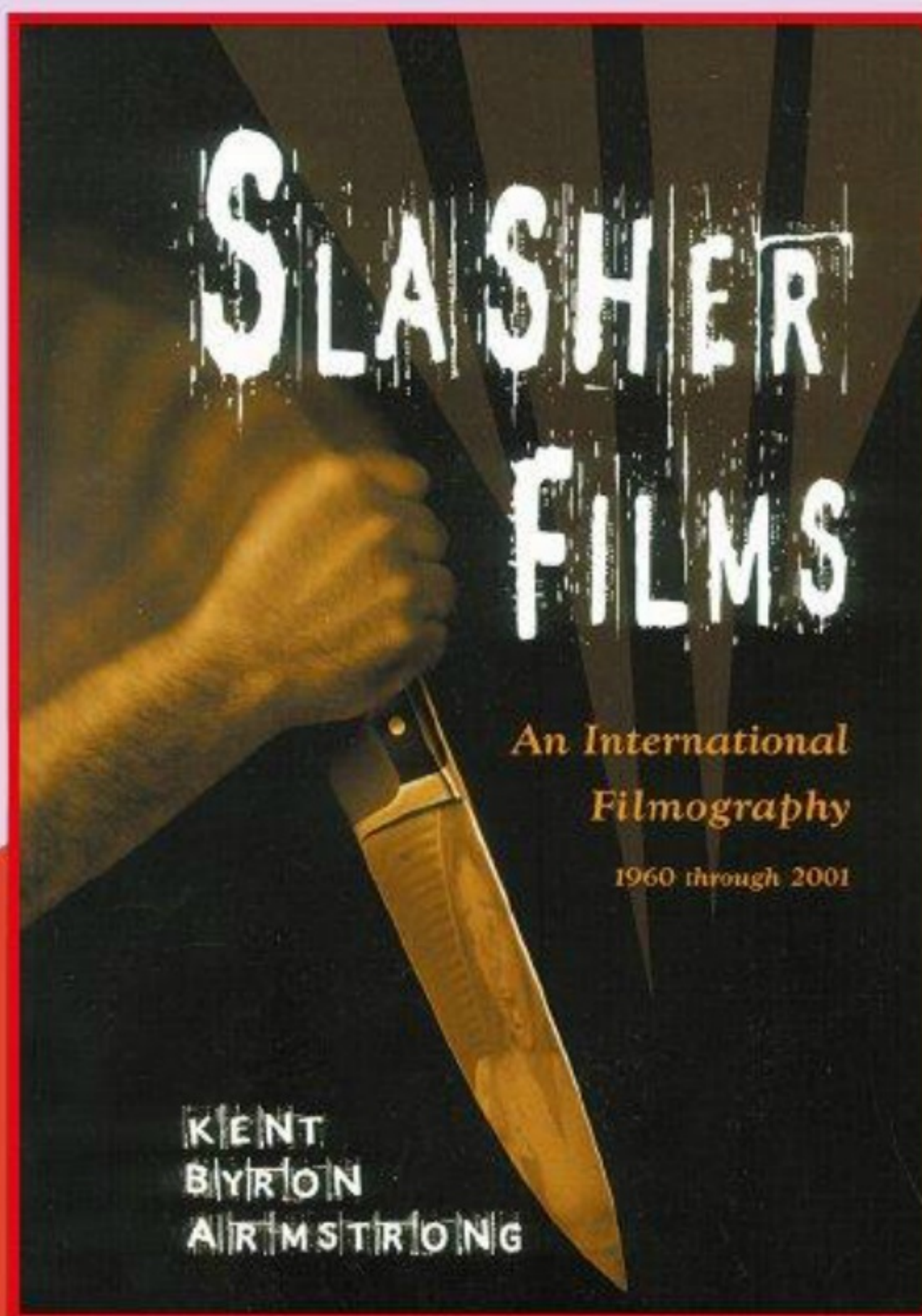
He still possessed his looks, his health, and his fame. Although he had already made some serious mistakes in managing his stardom, he was not yet suffering unduly from them" (TIC, p. 189). Similar repetition, using like words and phrases occurs when Lennig twice tells how he, as a teenager, told Lugosi how unfair it was that Karloff got top billing when Lugosi was better (see TIC, p. 365 and p. 409). Later, Lennig recaps Lillian Lugosi's 20 years with her husband (pp. 392-393), cataloguing—perhaps for emphasis—incidents that he's already described. Such duplication, while not frequent, is noticeable and should have been eliminated.

THE IMMORTAL COUNT features stills that are glossier than, and sometimes different from those in the earlier edition, but not quite as many, and they're grouped together in signatures. (THE COUNT incorporated its photos into the text.) THE COUNT also employed footnotes, but THE IMMORTAL COUNT—following a regrettable trend—uses *end* notes (over 900, reflecting Lennig's greater depth of research), necessitating a lot of flipping back and forth for readers who want to find the source of a quote or anecdote or read Lennig's often interesting asides (eg., p. 501, n. 81, wherein he speculates on what **DRACULA** would have been like if Lon Chaney, Sr. had lived to play the vampire).

Despite these drawbacks, THE IMMORTAL COUNT is well worth buying and reading for anyone interested in Lugosi. Its sections on Lugosi's pre-film life (usually the most tedious aspects for film students) are engrossing; its expanded section on **DRACULA**—film and play—is thorough and thought-provoking, and the newly added Epilogue, describing the legal battle between Lugosi's heirs and Universal for control of Lugosi's image is an eye-opener that shows Lugosi's son in a bad light for his apparent harassment of Bela's fifth wife, Hope, and goes a long way toward "rehabilitating" the widow's reputation (a process already begun by others); she comes off not as a callous, even heartless crank but more like an unfortunate woman hounded by Lugosi's tenacious (Lennig says "greedy") offspring.

As one might expect, THE IMMORTAL COUNT also offers a critique of **ED WOOD**, the movie. Lennig doesn't think much of Ed Wood the person, but, after listing the factual flaws in Tim Burton's biopic, Lennig concludes, "To those who had the privilege of meeting him [Lugosi] during his final years, the film is close enough to the facts to be unbelievably painful. This author must confess that his meetings with Lugosi remain

among his most thrilling memories and that, despite its faults and occasional distortions, **ED WOOD** for those personal reasons is the most moving film he ever experienced" (TIC, p. 410)—a passage which nicely encapsulates the strengths of Lennig's book: a meticulous attention to the details of Lugosi's life and an unabashed adoration of the man and his work.



SLASHER FILMS: AN INTERNATIONAL FILMOGRAPHY 1960 THROUGH 2001

By Kent Byron Armstrong
McFarland and Company
www.mcfarlandpub.com

Box 611, Jefferson NC 28640; 800-253-2187,
Fax 336-246-4403, 376 pp., \$65.00 hardcover

Reviewed by Tim Lucas

This latest addition to McFarland's ongoing "Filmography" series is one of the most baffling film books we've seen. Author Kent Byron Armstrong has opted to profile "over 250 slasher films" (according to McFarland's press sheet—we counted only 175) by synthesizing each title at great length and then attaching a short one-paragraph rider of personal commentary, usually two or three sentences of yay/nay, followed by one or two

sentences of the most trivial trivia... and often less. (**THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE** is reviewed in only two sentences, after eight staggering paragraphs of compressed but somehow still endless narrative.) Since virtually all of the films covered here are now, or were formerly, available on video, what possible use could be served by such an approach? Are there people who would rather spend \$65 to have the plots of slasher movies paraphrased by an employee of *THE MITCHELL TRIBUNE* (Armstrong's only listed credit), than to splurge an equal amount on video rentals that would bring them into direct contact with the movies themselves? Besides which, is plot really what films like **MY BLOODY VALENTINE**, **HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ME**, or even **DEEP RED**, have to offer?

In most film books, synopses are used as a preamble to lengthier discussions requiring the preliminary refreshment of memory, but this is not what *SLASHER FILMS* offers. Frankly, Armstrong's capsule commentaries sometimes seem padded even when they are only a sentence long, and some of his single sentences demand explanations that the hapless reader is left to imagine for himself (e.g., "**SISTERS OF DEATH** has its moments amid amateurish acting and lifeless direction"). When Armstrong champions something, he leans heavily on the words "superb" and "effective," a bereftness of vocabulary that is made unusually apparent by the book's overall scarcity of critical comment; he also has a tendency to add the word "very" to adjectives that gain nothing from it ("very influential," "very menacing," "very effective"). This glib approach doesn't permit much in the way of analytic reasoning ("Pleasence is great," "York is excellent," "Bale is absolutely superb," "**PROM NIGHT** is deservedly a slasher classic"), so the reader is *told* rather than informed and must take whatever Armstrong says, in his sprint to the next synopsis, on good faith. Armstrong's only opportunity to delve deeper into his subject is a 19-page Introduction, which—though written somewhat professorially—is so elementary, so "duh" in substance that you'll wonder if the book was undertaken as some kind of a practical joke on the publisher ("Some slasher films introduce the film (and the killer) with a murder...", "Any character who appears in a slasher film is a potential victim...", "The killer of a slasher film can be anyone...").

Appendices are included for "slasher directors" (21 of them, accounting for only 57 of the 175 films covered), "slasher actors," "slasher screenwriters" and "slasher composers" (a total of four scores have entitled the prolific Ennio Morricone to this enviable epithet), and these lists manage to reveal more about the book's own shortcomings than about the careers of the artists mentioned therein. For example, Wes Craven is represented only as the director of **SCREAM** and its sequels, with no entry for **LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT**—or **A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET** and its many sequels, which the author excludes for the odd reason that their violence is dealt by "some kind of supernatural force." It's necessary for an author to define his territory and stay within it, but isn't something fundamentally wrong with a prospectus that deliberately omits one of the most commercially successful franchises within one's elected area of coverage—especially when the same book sees fit to include not only the **SCREAM** trilogy (a response to Craven's earlier work in the same genre) and the pseudo-supernatural **HALLOWEEN** series, but also the pointedly fantastic **CHILD'S PLAY** films? Lucio Fulci and Robert Fuest are shown on equal footing in the annals of Slashiana, each having two slasher films to his credit. This is, of course, a gross underestimation of Fulci; as for Fuest, **THE ABOMINABLE DR. PHIBES** and its sequel are "body count" movies of a sort, but in no way can they be called "slasher films," as not one murder in either picture is committed with a wielded knife or razor, or by Phibes' own hand. The same goes for Alfred Hitchcock's **FRENZY**, which is included despite being about a strangler.

But even misguided scholarship would be more welcome than all of these pointless synopses. There is a place for these in film references, but that place is not centerstage; authors who make use of synopses should be required to bring something more to the task than mundane transcription. Readers in search of information about these or any other kind of films deserve more than a numbing remastication of stories they either already know or would prefer not to have spoiled in advance—especially after shelling out \$65.

After reading *SLASHER FILMS*, one can't help but look back fondly on the days when movie synopses were accompanied in pressbooks by the admonition "Not For Publication."



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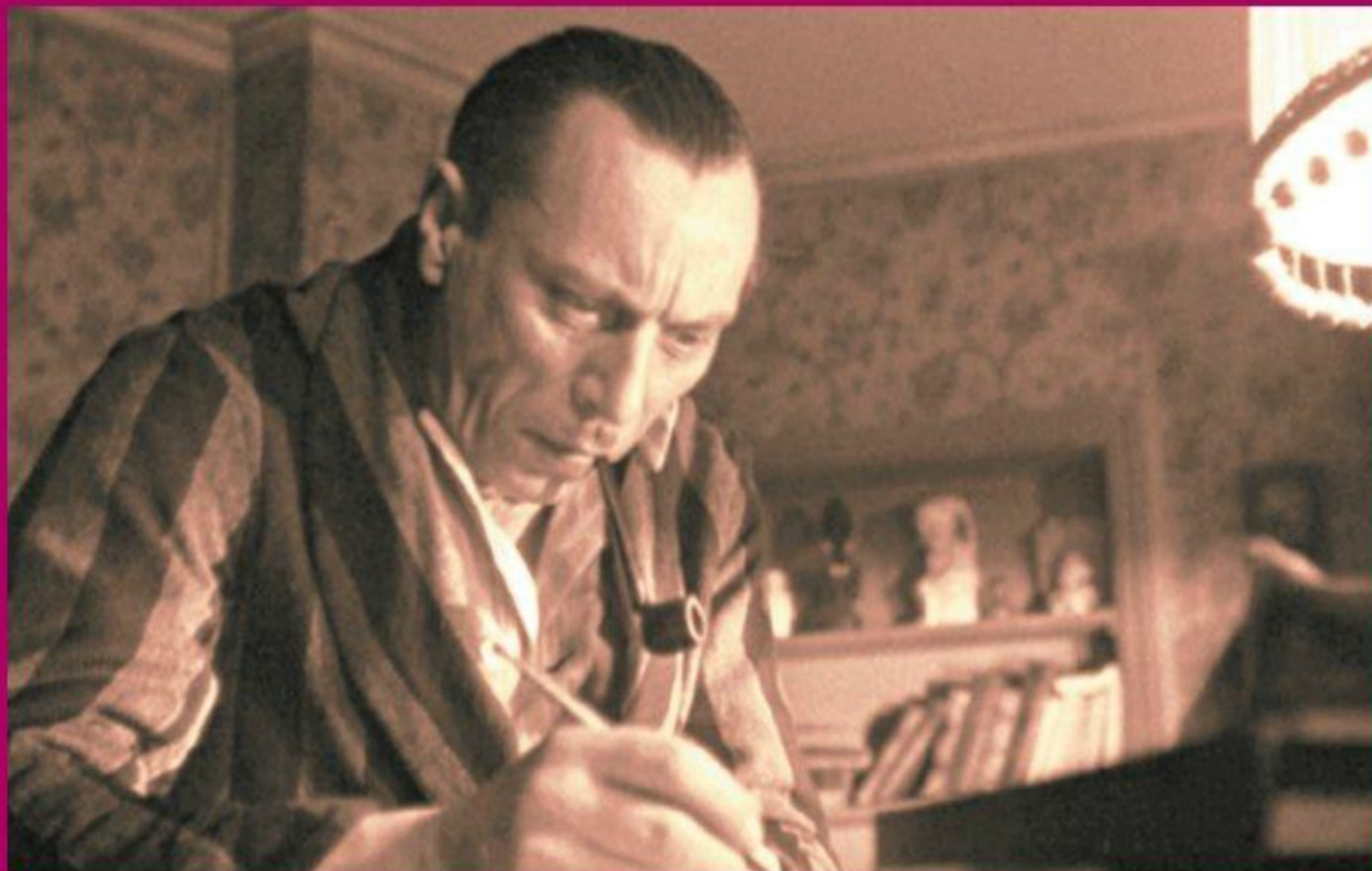
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THE LETTERBOX



FORWARDED BY DAVID DEL VALLE

I passed through L.A. on my way to Europe and packed your VIDEO WATCHDOG magazine that I found waiting for me.

I had no idea it was going to be such an expansive interview and was quite startled at the huge length of the article! You really did an amazing job. It was like a whole lifetime passing in those pages. Thank you for everything.

Gordon Hessler

STORIES OF O

Kudos to your superb coverage of Gordon Hessler's AIP years in VW #98. I, too, savaged

his work (except for **MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE**) in the fan press when it was new (via Fred Olen Ray's **DAGON**). Yet, down through the decades, I've seldom missed a telecast of it, recorded broadcast versions for my collection when that became an option, and this year was unreasonably eager to get my hands on MGM's gorgeous new DVDs. It was pleasing to see how closely your thoughts reflect my own on these films and their "new" incarnations (I agree that a **CRY OF THE BANSHEE** double feature would have been appropriate).

It was perceptive of you to connect **THE OBLONG BOX** to its source material through its use of an artist in the cast of

characters. This particular Poe tale has always seemed to me to be linked to the author's other story of O, "The Oval Portrait," in their mutual superimposition of death over a work of art. In "The Oblong Box," a corpse is mistaken for a painting. In "The Oval Portrait," a woman sickens and dies as her painted likeness-in-progress becomes more and more lifelike. And here, in Hessler and Wicking's **THE OBLONG BOX**, we have Joshua Kemp sketching Tom Hackett's waterlogged remains—but drawing him as a living man. Given this

Louis Jouvet as the methodical, meddling inspector of QUAI DES ORFEVRES.

Poesque pedigree, perhaps it would be as well for the lady's health if Kemp never gets around to painting Elizabeth Markham's portrait, especially an oval one! I can just see Julian sending him over to paint Elizabeth's disagreeable father ("It's on me...").

Unless I'm mistaken, this film contains one of those examples of DVD putting too fine a point on things: The crucifixion in Joshua's studio (1:12:12), supposedly a work in progress, looks like a print on slick paper—folded in three places! "I've a great deal of work to do on that yet," indeed!

Martin Nicholas
Sarasota FL

KEEP WATCHING THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In discussing Tom Weaver's commentary track, Tim Lucas' review of **IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE** [VW 99:52] says, "His most important call here is the discrediting of credited screenwriter Harry Essex's involvement in the script, which consisted almost entirely of the inexperienced [Ray] Bradbury's overlong treatment."

That call turned up for the first time in my book **KEEP WATCHING THE SKIES**, Volume 1 (1982). In fact, one of the two aspects of the first volume of KWTS in which I took the most pride were A) demonstrating how the 1950s reissue of **KING KONG** gave rise to the Giant Bug subgenre, and B) demonstrating how the script of **IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE** owed *far* more to Bradbury than to Essex.

Bradbury gave me access to his screen treatments (which were not "overlong") for **ICFOS**, and I was the first to quote directly from them. It may be just a small corner of a small area

of movie scholarship, but by George, it is my own. I am not trying to take away anything from Tom's excellent commentary track, just to establish primacy in the one area of film scholarship in which I was a pioneer.

Bill Warren
Los Angeles CA

CHANNEL SURFING

After reading Shane Dallmann's review of Image's **THE BEACH GIRLS AND THE MONSTER** in VW #98, I had to write and tell you about several curious differences I found between the film and its TV version, **MONSTER FROM THE SURF**, which aired on American Movie Classics (AMC). I haven't watched Image's DVD, but I own the Englewood Entertainment/Wade Williams Collection VHS, and I compared that with Shane's review as well as the AMC print.

The Englewood tape runs 64m; the Image disc, 65m 57s. However, AMC's **MONSTER FROM THE SURF** runs 74m 20s, excluding the commercial break—over 8m longer than the disc! I'm not sure what the extra footage consists of; it'll take some courage to go scene-by-scene through each version. (Do we *need* eight more minutes of this movie?) The color surfing footage appears about 15m into the film, as Arnold Lessing, the young male lead, sits with a friend and projects it in his den. Shane reports the footage is B&W on Image's DVD and in color in AMC's print, but I found the opposite to be true. The footage is in color on the Englewood tape, but in B&W on AMC!

AMC's print has an instrumental surf music theme over the opening credits. The Englewood tape has the same theme but with a vocal! At first I thought the vocal was an "embellishment" added by Wade Williams (as he's sometimes

known to do), but someone on the Sinister Cinema board told me the vocal was eliminated for the TV version. Very odd. The opening titles are computer-generated on the Englewood tape, whereas original titles are retained on the AMC print. In all fairness, the original titles are faded and difficult to read (they're white and blend into the background).

So, there you have it. I don't know if there's anyone on the planet who cares, but that's what I found.

Mike Mariano
Encino CA

Mike's letter proves that Image's DVD was not taken from the same element as the Englewood VHS—or, if it was, the telecine operator proceeded unaware of the color footage and left the chroma turned off throughout the transfer. It also proves that AMC—which no longer broadcasts films in widescreen—have likewise reverted to showing a B&W print after initially showing a version with the color insert. I can confirm Shane's AMC sighting of the color footage, because I saw it too.

UNE AUTRE SOURCE DE BANDE SONORE

Douglas E. Winter's excellent "Audio Watchdog" columns regularly cost me money as I'm inspired to seek out desirable CD releases, the availability of which I was previously unaware. However, for a change, I hope I might be able to help fellow soundtrack enthusiasts save a penny or two.

In his column in VW #98, Douglas remarks that Japan is the only territory in which the soundtrack from Brian De Palma's **FEMME FATALE** has been issued. In fact, it is also available as a more wallet-friendly pressing in France

(ULM 017 940-2, 15 tracks, 66m 58s), which, given the film's French co-financing and setting, I suggest makes it less of a surprise than had it not been released there. Although the French version contains 15 tracks as opposed to the Japanese release's 14, the "Lost Theme" mentioned by Douglas is not included, track #'s 14 and 15 being vocal numbers by Elli Medeiros and Damien Saez respectively. However, the full version of the rousing Bolerish and its rather more tranquil piano arrangement are present and correct.

I acquired a copy through www.amazon.fr back at the beginning of the year for 21 Euros (approx \$23.75).

Tim Greaves
Hants, England

JLA INFECTED BY EVIL

I recently purchased the Carlton PAL R2 Hammer Vampire Collection (**COUNTESS DRACULA**, **TWINS OF EVIL**, **VAMPIRE CIRCUS**). Upon loading the **TWINS OF EVIL** disc, I noticed that the main theme sounded very similar to that of Cartoon Network's new JUSTICE LEAGUE program. I played the JL DVD and, sure enough, they were very, very close. Could be another odd case of unconscious plagiarism. I'd encourage you to check it out if for no other reason than as a bit of trivia.

John B. Bulevich
St. Louis MO

BETTER LATE THAN LATER

I realize that this letter has certain Rip van Winkle qualities, but I hope it's not too late to comment on a DVD review which appeared in VW #76. Your review of Terayama Shuji's

FRUITS OF PASSION contains a number of factual errors and reveals an ignorance of Terayama's importance in Japan's post-war culture.

First, the mistakes. The film was wholly financed by the late Anatole Dauman's (one "n" in Dauman) Argos Films in Paris. The nominal Japanese co-production company was Terayama's own Terayama Productions (not "Terayaga"). **FRUITS OF PASSION** was not Terayama's last feature; that was *Saraba Hakobune* (**FAREWELL TO THE ARK**, 1984), based on his own stage adaptation of Gabriel Garcia Marquez' ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE; Terayama had almost finished the post-production at the time of his death in May 1983. (Pioneer recently published *Saraba Hakobune* on DVD in Japan, serial number PIBD-1054, alongside DVDs of Terayama's first two features: *Sho o Suteyo*, *Machi a Deyo* ("Throw Away Your Books, Let's Go Into the Streets," 1971), and *Den'en ni Shisu* ("Pastoral Hide-and-Seek," 1974.) Stupidly, none of these discs has an English subtitle option.) And the Vietnamese-French director of **THE SCENT OF GREEN PAPAYA** (and two other excellent features) is Tran Anh Hung; surname "Tran," personal names "Anh Hung."

Second, the production history. Anatole Dauman, a producer with a beyond distinguished track record, grew interested in the early '70s in producing arthouse titles with elements of hardcore sex. He was responding, obviously, to the new visibility of hardcore quickies in the American and French markets. He approached a number of famous directors; the only one to (eventually) respond positively was Oshima Nagisa, who contracted to make three features for Argos Films. The first of these was *Ai no Corrida* ("In the Realm of the Senses," 1976), which made the

expected waves. But Oshima (who has never once repeated himself in the course of along career) followed this with *Ai no Borei* ("Empire of Passion," 1978): a film about frustrated voyeurism and sexual guilt centered on concealment rather than exposure. Although the film won Oshima the Best Director prize in Cannes, Dauman was furious about his refusal to make another "explicit" movie and the contract was ended with acrimony.

Hiroko Govaers, the Paris-based agent for Terayama's films and theater tours, saw an opening and proposed Terayama as director for Dauman's next pornographic art movie. Dauman had the film rights to the Pauline Réage novel *RETOUR A ROISSY* and invited Terayama to adapt it. Terayama, long Oshima's only serious rival as a culture hero for Japanese students, agreed readily—but found Klaus Kinski and the other Western actors provided by Dauman impossible to direct in the way he wanted to. As in his only other commissioned feature **BOXER** (made for Toei in 1977), Terayama found himself making a film split down the middle between fulfillment of his producer's expectations and his own wish to work with the core members of his theater group Tenjo-Sajiki and to develop on film ideas and scenes from their stage work together.

Everything that your reviewer finds "not immediately interpretable" in **FRUITS OF PASSION** comes directly from Tenjo-Sajiki performances, most particularly the play *Nuhikun* ("Directions to Servants"), a dissection of the master/servant *gestalt* inspired by a Jonathan Swift satire. So do the actors Wakamatsu Takeshi, Niitaka Keiko, *et al*; even the celebrated transvestite Peter, who plays the brothel madame (and can also be seen

in Matsumoto Toshio's **FUNERAL PARADE OF ROSES** and Kurosawa Akira's **RAN**), briefly appeared on stage with Tenjo-Sajiki.

An already overlong letter would swell to essay length if I tried to sketch Terayama's career and importance in Japan's fast developing culture of the '60s and '70s. Maybe it's enough to say that Terayama's work was an inter-related tangle of plays, poems, novels, movies, photographs and boxing/horse-racing commentaries. Almost all of it contains elements of fantasy and should be of interest to VW readers—not least the large number of *avant-garde* short films he made, published a few years ago as a handsomely designed box set of VHS tapes by Image Forum in Tokyo.

While I'm here, though, perhaps I can throw a little light on the disappearance of the Wong Kar-Wai episode "The Follow" from the BMW freebie DVD **THE HIRE** [discussed in VW 81:4]. Nothing to do with Wong Kar-Wai himself. I have it on very good authority that the person who objected to the episode's inclusion on the promo DVD was the uncredited cast member Forest Whitaker.

Tony Rayns
London, England

FAKING AND LIFE-TAKING

As I finished VW #98, I felt the need to ask a question that has been on my mind for some time. In your reviews of **BLOODY MOON** and **THE KILLER SNAKES** [98:70-73], some scenes depicting cruelty to animals were mentioned. John Charles in particular noted that "animal lovers should definitely give this one a miss," due to the mistreatment of reptiles in his reviewed film. I

respect your sensitivity to animal mistreatment, and find no fault in your reviewers drawing attention to scenes that might be offensive to some; however, why are scenes of *human* brutality unmentioned, praised, or at least seen favorably in the context of the entire film, when animal cruelty is decried?

I love and respect animals, and fully believe that I have a responsibility to treat them with care. But I also believe that I have an even greater responsibility to my fellow human beings. I would like to better understand why animal cruelty is pointed out and denounced, while often human cruelty is ignored (or at times celebrated within the context of a film). I have seen instances in your pages where you have made note that a particular scene (or film) may be considered offensive because of what happens to the actors and actresses in it. I thank you for that and encourage you to continue.

J. Todd Kingrea
Cleveland TN

*We only mention such violence in cases where it has not been faked. Unfortunately, especially in films shot outside the United States, live animals are sometimes butchered on camera, for real; when a movie depicts violence directed against its human characters, we assume that no one was actually killed for our entertainment, so the two do not equate at all. There was one instance in our entire reviewing history when a movie featured the actual killing of a man—the Monkees movie **HEAD** incorporates footage of the point-blank pistol execution of a Vietcong war prisoner—and we made a point of this in our review. Amazingly enough, the MPAA rated this bit of bonafide snuff footage "G."*



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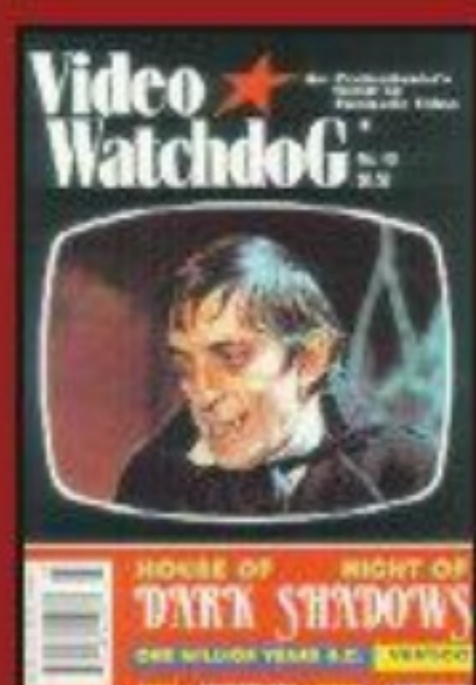
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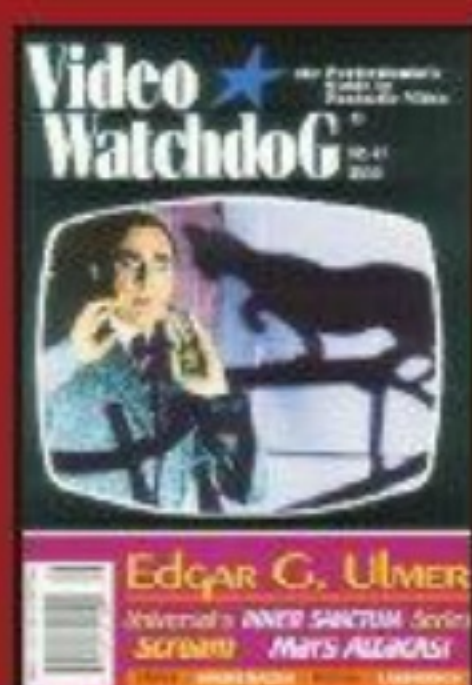
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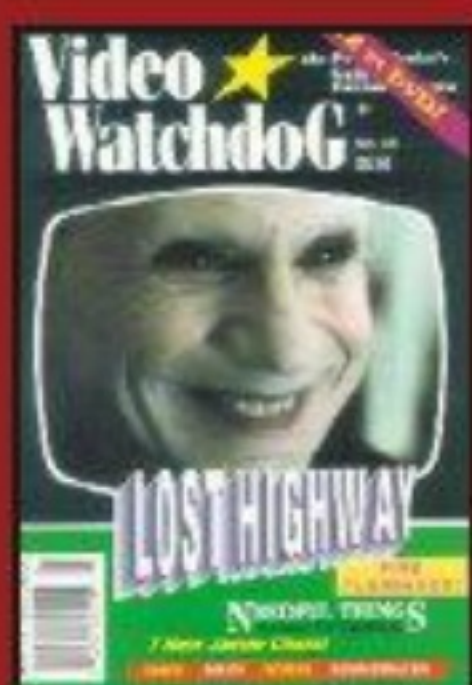
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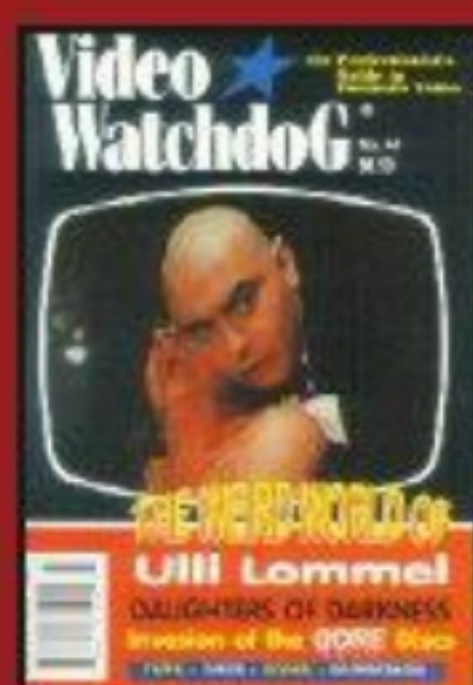
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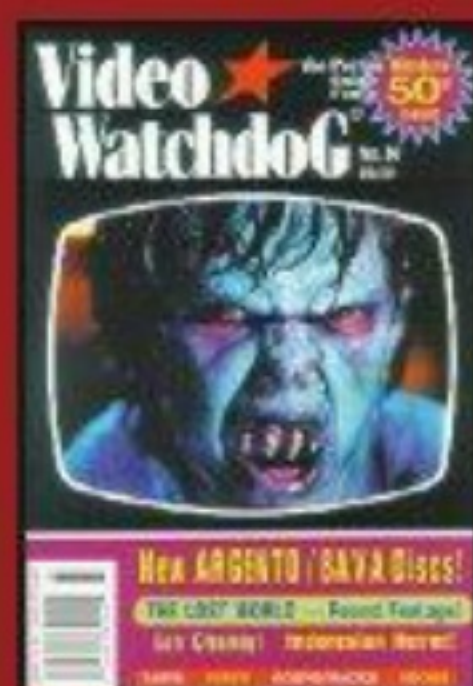
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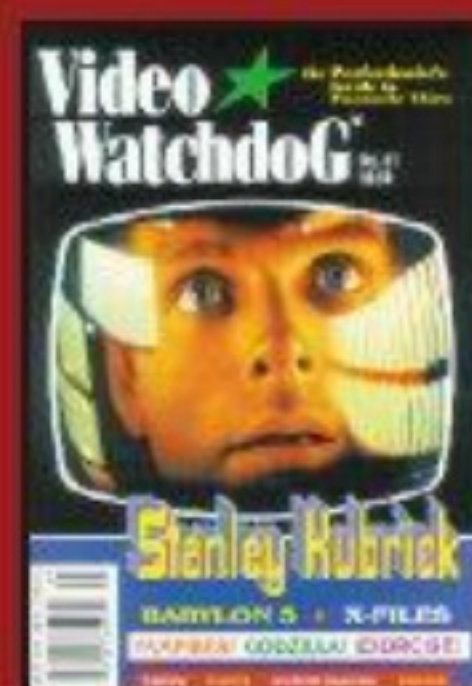
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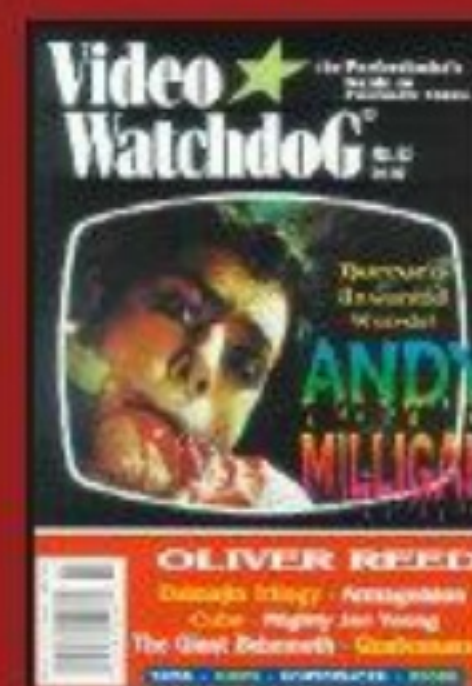
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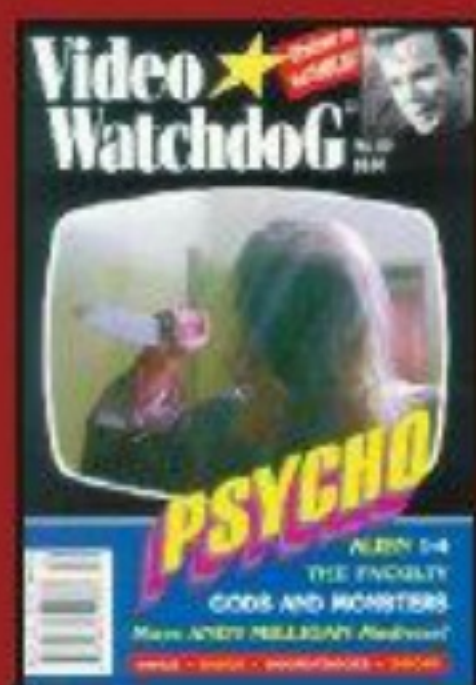
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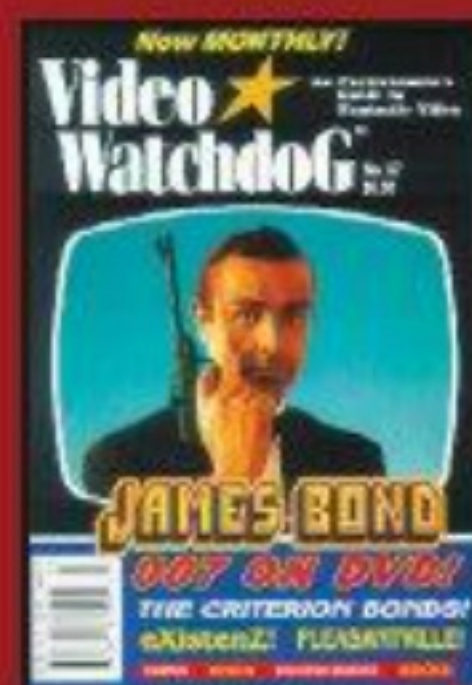
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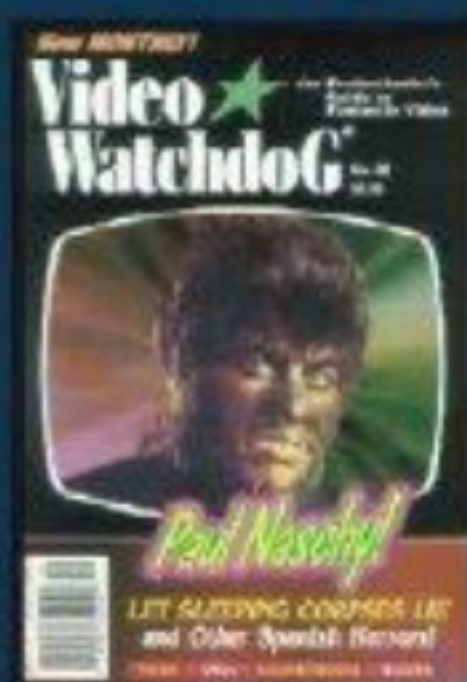
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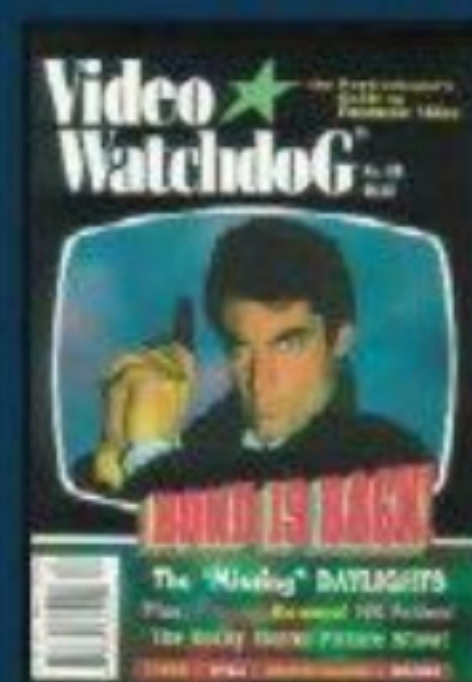
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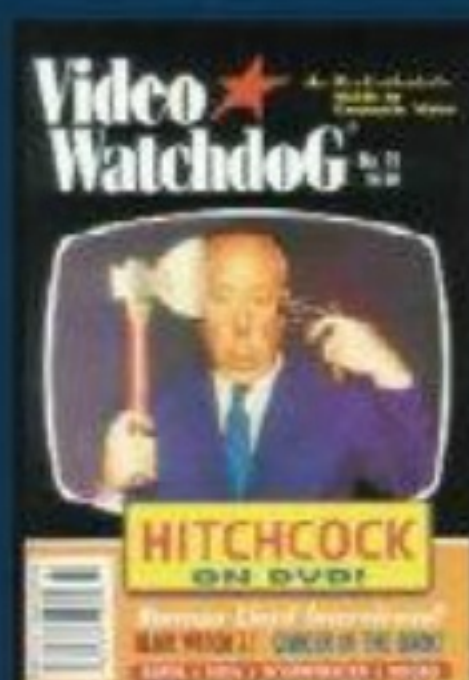
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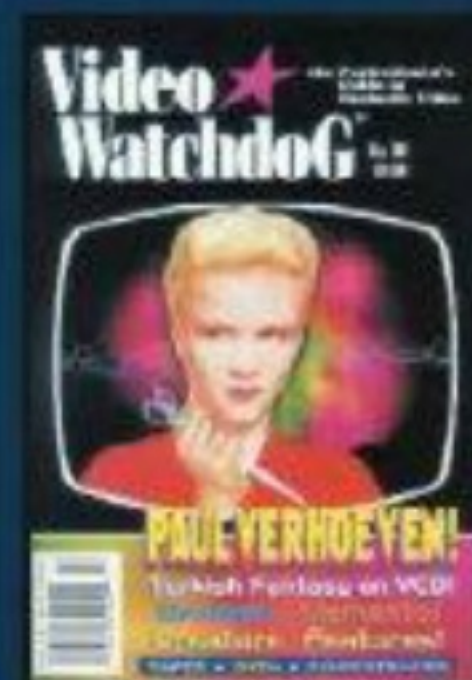
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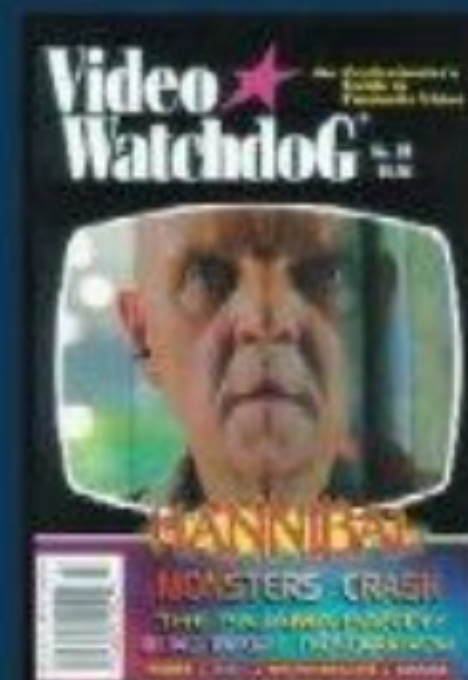
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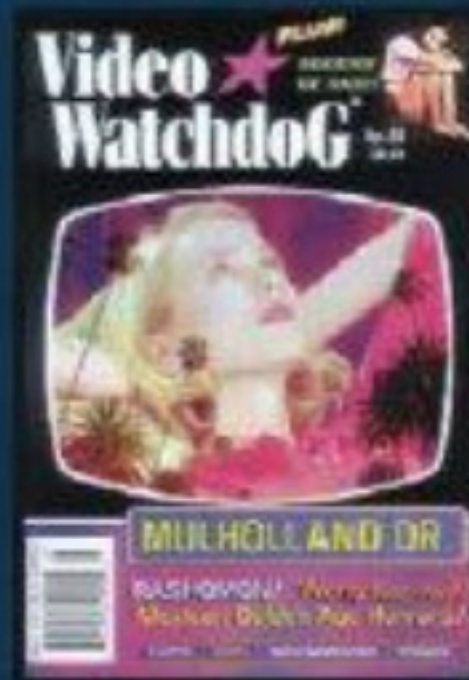
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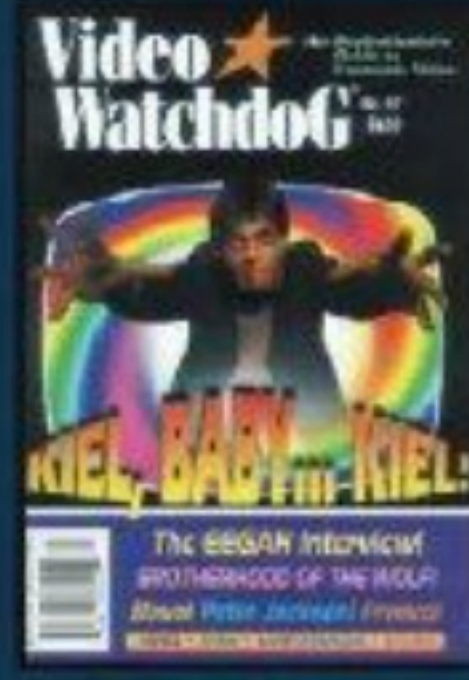
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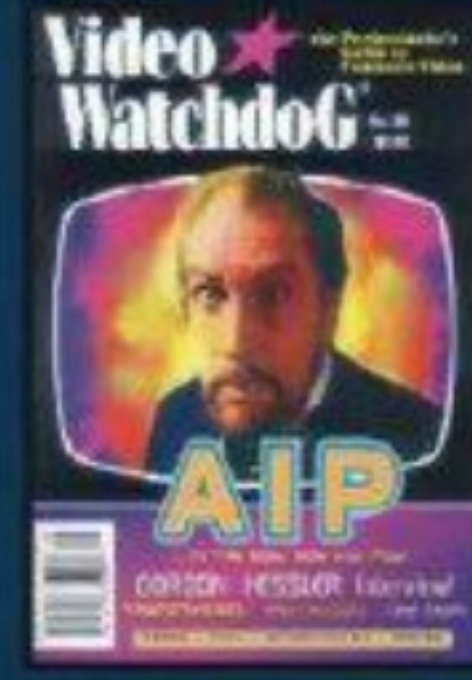
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2003

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